

The Impact of Migration on Children in the Caribbean

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Executive summary

Caribbean societies have a high degree of mobility, exporting the largest proportion of its constituent population in percentage terms, in the world.¹ In many English speaking Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the number of migrants per population outnumbers by ten the world's average figure. Over the past four decades, the Caribbean region has lost more than 5 million people (UN Population Division, 2003) to migration and an average of 40 per cent of its skilled labour force.² Migration in the region includes internal (rural-urban), intra regional as well as extra regional migration. National migratory patterns and trends however are complex and diverse depending on culture, economic factors and human development as well as the countries geographical position.³ These mobile societies place children at risk and jeopardize the safety and wellbeing of migrant children as well as children left behind by one or both parents who have migrated.

All children have the right to care and protection. Violations of these rights do however occur worldwide and are often unrecognized and underreported, creating massive barriers to the development and well being of children. Children, in the same manner of their parents, are rights holders and are entitled to the wide set of rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) such as: (a) the right to develop to their full potential; (b) enjoy his/her own culture and identity; and (c) care and protection while separated from his/her parents should only be in the best interest of the child. However, the reality is that children in the Caribbean are significantly affected by migration. They risk losing the right to education, health, as well as long and sometimes indefinite periods of separation from their parent(s).

Children left behind⁴ as well as migrant children⁵ constitute a particular vulnerable group. The impact of parents' migration on children can be devastating as it threatens the long-term well-being and development of Caribbean adolescents into adulthood. Children affected by migration face several challenges in terms of education and health care as well as various psychosocial problems. Many children left behind suffer from depressions, low self-esteem which can lead to behavioural problems, and at increased risk of poor academic performance as well as interruption of schooling. Particular to migrant children is the access to health and education, especially when they are undocumented. Birth registration could also form an obstacle, especially for the Haitian population residing outside their country. Additionally migrant children and children left behind are at a higher risk and more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, including sexual abuse as well as child labour and trafficking.

In addressing the various impacts of migration on children, there is a need for more concerted efforts in research and data collection in order to understand the complexity of the situation and share this information for the development of efficient and effective policies to minimise these impacts. A region-wide social protection policy should be developed to cater for all children and their families irrespective of their status. The ongoing negotiations on the Protocol on Contingency Rights⁶ at CARICOM should be compliant with the CRC and will be

¹ Reis, 2008, *Country Assessment report: Dominica*, UNICEF Internal Document

² IMF 2006, *Emigration and Brain Drain: Evidence from the Caribbean*, WP/06/25.

³ IOM, *Exploratory Assessment of Trafficking in Persons in the Caribbean Region*, 2005, p.9

⁴ *Children left behind* throughout this document will mean children that are left behind by one or both parents who have migrated

⁵ *Migrant children* throughout this document will mean children who are migrating with one or both parents, with a relative or caregiver, or unaccompanied (without any parent, relative or caregiver)

⁶ Contingent Rights are rights to which the principal beneficiary, spouse and dependents are entitled in the host country under the condition that the principal beneficiary has moved to exercise one or more of the right on establishment, provision of service and movement of capital

instrumental for Governments to protect their citizens and children in host countries as well as to guarantee the fulfilment of parental duties for children left behind.

Introduction

Migration is a central feature of the demographic landscape of the Caribbean. This includes migration within the sub-region, within the borders of individual countries (internal migration), seasonal migration, as well as external migration (outside of the Caribbean region). These various forms of migration have profound effects on Caribbean society as a whole, and more specifically on the most vulnerable - women and children. However, migration is almost always discussed from an economic standpoint, with the role of remittances viewed as a development issue with positive economic effects and growth, but the impact on children has not been taken into account during these discussions.

The Caribbean Community established the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) in 1989 and envisioned an integrated development strategy:

- Deepening economic integration by advancing beyond a common market towards a Single Market and Economy
- Widening the membership and thereby expanding the economic mass of the Caribbean Community
- Progressive insertion of the region into the global trading and economic system by strengthening trading links with non-traditional partners

The CSME has enhanced the migration or free movement of certain categories of qualified professionals, musicians, sports people and skilled workers by liberating conditions of access to markets and skills within the region. Under the free movement protocols, certain professional categories of CARICOM nationals have been eligible for free movement throughout participating states without the need for work permits. It is envisioned that eventually there will be free movement of all persons within the CSME

The Caribbean is among regions with the highest percentage of people migrating. The percentage of qualified women migrants is growing, with women seeking employment in the health and education sectors in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom⁷ and elsewhere (i.e. Guyanese in Barbados).

Children constitute a vulnerable group and a child could become more vulnerable when one or both parents migrate. The effects of migration could have a profound impact on the child's development and future opportunities. Some recent conferences⁸ have recognised the positive economic effects of migration, but also draw attention to the ways in which migration affects the poor and most vulnerable children. Although research has been done in terms of remittances, little information is available in terms of the actual social impact of migration on families and their children.

This paper offers an insight into the risk and vulnerability of children affected by migration and the potential infringement and denial of children's rights. It concentrates on aspects of education, health care, birth registration, abuse, exploitation and child labour, as well as the psychosocial effects of two categories of children namely:

- 'children left behind' by one or both parents due to migration
- 'migrant children' who migrate unaccompanied or with one or both parents/caretakers

⁷ Schmid (2005), *Migration in the Caribbean - What do we know? An overview of data, policies and programmes at the international and regional levels to address critical issues*, UNECLAC, LC/CAR/L.54

⁸ Transnational Parenthood and Children-Left-Behind, Oslo, Norway, 20-21, November 2008 and the Working Group on Childhood and Migration-Childhood and Migration Conference 2008 online reference <http://globalchild.rutgers.edu/biographies.htm#ac>

The rights of children

All Caribbean States have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Article 2 of the CRC states that “*State parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the 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*”. State parties are therefore obligated to ensure the rights of all the children within State territory, including those of migrant children.

In reality, children left behind and migrant children are often deprived of their fundamental rights to grow up with a nurturing family environment (CRC Art. 3, 5 & 18). The family environment's is often unable to provide sufficient protection and makes these children more susceptible to all forms of abuse and exploitation. Caribbean States party to the Convention have the duty to prevent abuse (CRC Art. 19), commercial and sexual exploitation of minors (CRC Art. 34), human trafficking (CRC Art. 35) and exploitation (CRC Art. 36) of children who have been left behind, children transiting, and those temporarily or permanently migrating (either unaccompanied or accompanied by their parents or other caregivers). Apart from protection, the Convention also obligates States to ensure the mental, spiritual, moral or social development of children.

Caribbean States are obligated to provide all children, including migrant children and children left behind, equal opportunity to education (CRC Art. 28). Education should also be directed to foster the full development of the child's personality, talents, mental and physical abilities and spirit of understanding peace, human rights tolerance and equality (CRC Art 29). The reality, however, in Caribbean, is that schools are not equipped to provide access to migrant children and are unable to deal with ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity in delivering quality education. This is an infringement of these children's rights.

The fact that many migrant children are also not documented or registered is a dilemma, as it deprives these children of their fundamental rights to a nationality, a name and identity, and consequently also of the belonging to a family (Art 7). In accordance with Article 24 children have the fundamental right “to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health” which can be at stake in the absence of parents or having an irregular status.

Migratory trends

The “culture of migration” as described by Thomas Hope (2003), has been a means throughout the Caribbean to seek better economic and educational opportunities. The long history of Caribbean migration, started with forced movement during the colonial times in the 17th, 18th and 19th century. The region also experienced migration in post colonial times with great waves moving and migrating to the United Kingdom and United States during the 1950s and 1960s.⁹

⁹ Ferguson James (2003), *Migration in the Caribbean: Haiti the Dominican and beyond*, p.6-7

The United States of America is still a major migration port for Caribbean nationals. According to statistics (April 2003) from United States Census Bureau¹⁰, Caribbean nationals account for 10 per cent of the total amount of immigrants into the USA. The majority of these are Cubans (34 per cent), Dominican Republicans (25 per cent) and citizens from Haiti and Jamaica (10 per cent). In South America, Guyanese are among the biggest group, and represent one out of ten immigrants.¹¹

Although movement outside the Caribbean Region covers 90 per cent of Caribbean migration, there has historically also been great inflow and outflow migration of person within the region. For instance, thousands of migrant workers moved to Panama for the construction of the Panama Canal in 1914 and others moved to Costa Rica, Panama or Honduras to work in the banana industry. In present times, however, the majority of migrants are nationals from Haiti, Dominican Republic, Guyana and Jamaica, while the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos as well as Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago being the major receiving countries of Caribbean migrants.

There is growing concern that a lot of undocumented migration occurs within the region. While it is often cheaper and easier to gain entry for migrants, the undocumented status poses great challenges of access to housing, education and health care for migrants and their children.¹²

Global migration patterns as well as those in the Caribbean region have been subject to an increased feminization. Statistics from the Population Reference Bureau indicate that the percentage of Caribbean female migrants increased from 45 per cent to 49 per cent between 1980 and 2000.¹³ Among the Caribbean States, Barbados has among the highest percentages of female migrants, reaching up to 60 per cent.

The publication entitled "*Migration in the Caribbean: Haiti, the Dominican and Beyond*, by James Ferguson, implies that there might be a correlation between this development and the construction of many economies. Caribbean economies, which were earlier based on commodities like sugar and bananas, have today adopted a relatively more diversified structure. Many states are reliant on tourism, a sector which tends to create increased employment opportunities for women.¹⁴

Even though the absolute migrant stock is comparatively small in the Caribbean, the migrant stock as percentage of the population is higher, and for some countries over ten times the world's average. **Table 1** presentation on population and migration data (UN Population Division, 2000) indicates that depending on the country, between 0.2 per cent and 39.1 per cent of the Caribbean population can be considered migrant. More specifically, the lowest percentages of migrants are found in Cuba (0.7 per cent), Jamaica (0.5 per cent), Guyana (0.2 per cent) and the Dominican Republic (1.6 per cent) and the highest proportions are reported in the Cayman Islands (39.1 per cent), Anguilla (35.6 per cent), British Virgin Islands (35.5 per cent), Aruba (30.8 per cent), the Netherlands Antilles (25.4 per cent), Antigua and Barbuda (24.5 per cent) and the United States Virgin Islands (28.8 per cent).

¹⁰ Immigration Statistics were retrieved in April 2003 from the following web-site of the Department of Homeland Security in the United States: <http://www.immigration.gov/graphics/shared/aboutus/statistics/index.htm>

¹¹ Schmid, *Migration in the Caribbean: What do we know?*, ECLAC 2005, p.10-11

¹² Ferguson James (2003), *Migration in the Caribbean: Haiti the Dominican and beyond*, p.6-7

¹³ Hania Zlotnik (2003) *Global Dimensions of Female Migration* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute: <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2007/FeminizationofMigrationLimitsofData.aspx>)

¹⁴ Ferguson James (2003), *Migration in the Caribbean: Haiti the Dominican and beyond*, p.6-7

Table 1: Population and Migrants data

<i>Country or area</i>	Population (thousands)		Migrant stock (thousands)		As percentage of population	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
World	5,254,820	6,056,715	153,956	174,664	2.93	2.88
More developed regions	1,148,365	1,191,429	81,424	104,119	7.09	8.74
Less developed regions	4,106,455	4,865,286	72,531	70,545	1.77	1.45
Least developed countries	514,605	667,613	10,992	10,458		
Latin America and the Caribbean	440,354	518,809	6,994	5,914	1.59	1.14
Caribbean	33,907	37,941	909	1,071	2.68	2.82
Anguilla	8	11	2	4	27.97	35.61
Antigua and Barbuda	63	65	12	16	19.18	24.47
Aruba	66	101	14	31	21.91	30.83
Bahamas	255	304	27	30	10.52	9.85
Barbados	257	267	21	25	8.32	9.16
British Virgin Islands	17	24	8	8	44.03	35.49
Cayman Islands	26	38	13	15	48.89	39.12
Cuba	10,629	11,199	100	82	0.94	0.73
Dominica	71	71	3	4	3.53	5.28
Dominican Republic	7,061	8,373	103	136	1.46	1.63
Grenada	91	94	4	8	4.70	8.50
Guadeloupe	391	428	66	83	16.88	19.44
Haiti	6,907	8,142	19	26	0.28	0.32
Jamaica	2,369	2,576	17	13	0.73	0.49
Martinique	360	383	39	54	10.74	14.21
Montserrat	11	4	2	0	18.76	4.86
Netherlands Antilles	188	215	38	55	20.48	25.35
Puerto Rico	3,528	3,915	322	383	9.14	9.79
St. Kitts and Nevis	42	38	4	4	9.64	11.19
Saint Lucia	131	148	5	8	4.06	5.45
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	106	113	4	8	3.79	6.66
Trinidad and Tobago	1,215	1,294	51	41	4.16	3.20
Turks and Caicos Islands	12	17	2	3	18.33	16.23
United States Virgin Islands	104	121	31	35	30.22	28.79
Central America	111,409	135,129	1,836	1,040	1.65	0.77
Belize	186	226	45	17	24.40	7.51
South America	295,037	345,738	4,250	3,803	1.44	1.10
Guyana	731	761	3	2	0.43	0.21
Suriname	402	417	9	6	2.13	1.49

Source: Karoline Schmid/ECLAC (2005) Migration in the Caribbean: What do we know, LC/CAR/L.54

The migration rates, however, understate the loss of the skilled and educated persons that tend to migrate. An IMF (2006) study indicates that a majority of Caribbean countries have lost more than 50 per cent of the labor force in the tertiary education segment, and more than 30 per cent in the secondary education segment.

Children left behind

Children who have been left behind by one or both parents who have migrated are placed in a vulnerable position and are subject to increased right violations. They face risks of abuse, including sexual abuse, and suffer from psychosocial problems and educational accomplishments due to parental migration. Their psychosocial well-being is greatly impacted by feelings of abandonment, low self esteem, anger, depression, material obsession and violence. In terms of academic performance increased responsibilities at home, lack of affordability, motivation and parental support can greatly impact the child's educational functioning.

Abuse and sexual abuse

According to the evaluation of the Health and Family Life Education programme, 18 per cent of the respondent children (average age of 14.7 yr) experienced forced sex.¹⁵ The vulnerability to abuse significantly increases when a child loses the protection of a parent(s). The gender of the migrating parent however has different effects on the family and a child's security, which could be captured by gender roles in Caribbean society.¹⁶ When the mother migrates, abuse whether it is physical, emotional, sexual or neglect is more likely to occur. Male migration, on the other hand, often leaves the child better protected but can see households with smaller financial resources. The income responsibility will often fall on the mother, spouse or sister with little remittances coming back from the migrated father. In some cases, mothers will engage in temporary secondary unions to make up for the loss of income and companionship. This can have tremendous effect on girls as they become more vulnerable to sexual abuse by their mothers' companions.¹⁷ Additionally it has been noted that girls often respond to male absenteeism by seeking attention from adult men, which adds to the risk of sexual abuse.¹⁸

Psychosocial effects

Children left behind suffer from a wide range of psychosocial problems due to parental migration. The most common psychosocial problems relate to emotional detachment and varies due to child shifting (children moving from homes to homes), gender, interpersonal difficulties, attachment to material resources and violence.

The most common psychosocial problems are feelings of abandonment, sadness, despondence, despair, anger, lack of trust, low self esteem, and inability to concentrate at school.¹⁹ The abandonment of a parent(s) sometimes has permanent effects on the child's life, and many spend their entire lives struggling with feelings of rejection and loss. The many broken promises of reunion with their parents further tend to result in emotional instability.

Child shifting, which is common in the Caribbean, might cause further harm as children are moved between different homes. This level of instability can have a great effect - "children in these situations are sad, at risk of depression that may succumb to aggressive impulses,

¹⁵ UNICEF (2009), *Strengthening Health and Family Life Education in the Region: The Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation of HFLE in Four CARICOM countries*

¹⁶ D'emilio, Cordero, Bainvel, Skoog, Comini, Gough, Dias, Saab, Kilbande (2007), *The impact of International Migration: Children left behind in selected countries in Latin America and the Caribbean*, p.8

¹⁷ Crawford –Brown (1994), *The "Barrel Children" of the Caribbean: The Socio-cultural Context of the Migrant Caribbean Family*. Dept. of Sociology and Social Work, UWI, Mona, Jamaica ISER.

¹⁸ Reis (2008), *Country Assessment report: Guyana*, UNICEF Internal Document

¹⁹ Reis (2008), *Country Assessment report: Dominica*, UNICEF Internal Document

have low self esteem” and they might have greater difficulties forming healthy relationships in the future.²⁰

The psychosocial and emotional consequences of separation from a parent(s) seem to also vary by gender. The coping mechanisms among boys often include externalizing their pain and frustration while girls tend to internalize their suffering. In their article, Jones, Sharpe and Sogren (2004) reported that “boys were more likely to have problems with interpersonal relationships and effectiveness while girls were more likely to experience negative mood and low self-esteem.” These findings have also been documented in studies conducted in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.²¹

In Trinidad and Tobago researchers found that “one third of children had serious levels of depression or interpersonal difficulties affecting schooling and leading in some cases to suicidal ideation”²². The research furthermore indicated that “children separated from parents because of migration were more than twice as likely as other children to have emotional problems although their economic status was improved”.²³

There is documented evidence on behavioural problems with regards to children being left behind, such as a particular attachment to material resources. Migrant parents, in many cases, try to compensate for their absence by sending a significant amount of material resources in the form of remittances or barrels with clothing and footwear.²⁴ In Belize this kind of compensation has been observed as making children more attached to material goods and resulting in a loss of moral values and deterioration of love and respect for their absent parents. Social workers have furthermore noted that the desire for material goods often lead children to crime and violence, especially if the remittances stopped coming.²⁵

Another behaviour problem observed is an increased amount of children turning to violence. Research from the University of the West Indies showed that the absence of mothers was one of the determining factors for children’s involvement in violence. According to survey results, the mothers of 80 per cent of the children in conflict with law were absent from their hearings. Among these cases, the second most common explanation for their mother’s absence was migration.²⁶ Children that have been left behind are also more at risk of running away from home, “acting out behaviour” or dropping out of school.

Education

In terms of education in the Caribbean, the lack of parental presence and guidance has various effects on the academic performance of children left behind. Researchers, social workers and welfare officers identified two particularly vulnerable age groups. The first one concerns children (left behind) between the ages of 11 and 13 years old who are transitioning from primary to secondary school, as they experience most frequent disruptions. These children seemed more likely to be involved in fights at school, or dropping out from school due to the coping difficulties or having to care for younger siblings. The

²² Ibid p.2

²¹ Jones, Adele et al (2004) *Children’s Experiences of Separation from Parents as a Consequence of Migration*. Caribbean Journal of Social Work 3, p.89-109.

²² Jones (2004), *Children’s Experiences of Separation from Parents as a Consequence of Migration*. Caribbean Journal of Social Work 3, p.89-109.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Crawford-Brown, Claudette (1994) *The “Barrel Children” of the Caribbean: The Socio-cultural Context of the Migrant Caribbean Family*. Dept. of Sociology and Social Work, UWI, Mona, Jamaica ISER

²⁵ Reis (2008), *Country Assessment report: Belize*, UNICEF Internal Document

²⁶ D’emilio, Cordero, Bainvel, Skoog, Comini, Gough, Dias, Saab, Kilbande (2007), *The impact of International Migration: Children left behind in selected countries in Latin America and the Caribbean*, p.10

second group involves adolescents between the ages 14-18 years old. These children were sometimes forced to assume surrogate parental roles, referred to as “parentification”²⁷, and are also particularly vulnerable considering the little support which is given to children in child-headed households in the Caribbean.

Although remittances are often assumed to increase the child’s opportunity to education, this is not necessarily always the case. In Haiti, it has been noted that even if receiving remittances, “the disruptive effect of household out-migration imposes an economic burden on the remaining household members and reduces their likelihood of being schooled”²⁸. The economic hardship faced as a consequence of parental migration might in fact force the children to work instead of going to school. Research from Haiti further implies that children sometimes have to “take over family chores or work in the family business, responsibilities that had previously been assumed by the absent family members”²⁹.

A final factor to be examined, which jeopardizes the education and well-being of the child, is the amount of children living with their grandparents. Survey results from Dominica in 2005 indicate that a large proportion of children reside with their grandparents: 48 per cent of primary school children and 36 per cent of secondary school students. Grandparents may often lack some of the informal societal support structures, and in parental absence, younger female relatives may instead have to bare the burden of providing care. There is also a concern that the children in substitute care, mostly living with their elderly grandparents, are less likely to receive quality nutrition and healthcare. In some case they also get less attention from the elderly grandparent which reduces their academic performance.

Migrant children

Besides children left behind, migrant children are also impacted by migration. They are an at risk group of children. The ramifications of migration can compromise or potentially cause harm to their long term development. Of particular importance are the effects on migrant children, in terms of psychosocial problems, education, health, birth registration, and exposure to child labour and trafficking.

Psychosocial effects

Migrant children suffer from various psychosocial difficulties including feelings of alienation, experiences of xenophobia, insecurity and depression. According to social workers in the Bahamas, Haitian immigrants tend to experience a lot of psychosocial distress. However, there is little evidence to support the claim.³⁰ The disparities between Bahamians and Haitian immigrants in terms of poverty rates, employment rates, access to water, sanitation and other resources, could potentially contribute to the psychosocial pressure impacting negatively on the overall wellbeing of the child.³¹ Haitian children constitute a significant vulnerable group, in fact 8% of Haitian immigrants are under the age of 14 and 21% between 15 and 24.³²

²⁷ D’Emilio, Anna Lucia et al (2007) *The Impact of International Migration: Children Left Behind in Selected Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean*. Working Papers, Division of Policy and Planning, UNICEF

²⁸ Amuedo-Dorantes, Catalina, Annie Georges, Susan Pozo (2008) *Migration, Remittances and Children’s Schooling in Haiti*, IZA DP no.5 Germany

²⁹ Amuedo-Dorantes, Catalina, Annie Georges, Susan Pozo (2008) *Migration, Remittances and Children’s Schooling in Haiti*, IZA DP no.5 Germany

³⁰ Reis (2008), *Country Assessment report: Bahamas*, UNICEF Internal Document

³¹ Department of Statistics, Nassau, Bahamas (2001), *Bahamas Living Conditions Survey (BLCS)*

³² Department of Statistics, Nassau, Bahamas (2001), *Bahamas Living Conditions Survey (BLCS)*

Education

In terms of education, migrant children often face difficulties due to language barriers, stigmatisation and ridicule by native children, causing disadvantage in the school system. The number of migrant children from Hispanic and Francophone countries moving to English speaking territories has also increased over the past 10 years. More children and adults from Santo Domingo move predominately to Antigua, St Kitts and Nevis, Turks and Caicos, the US Virgin Islands and Dominica, while Haitians predominately move to the Bahamas. This poses a challenge to receiving countries as they are faced with the burden of catering for the special needs of migrant children, which perhaps cannot be provided for. It should however also be noted that insufficient access to schools may in some cases also be the cause of domestic migration, especially in rural areas where the access to education is very limited.

The largest portion of budgetary allocations to the education sector in the region goes towards teachers' remuneration rather than for quality education for all children. Because Caribbean societies' demographics are being reconfigured as a result of intra-regional migration, this poses a challenge for educators who are constrained to plan for the influx of immigrant children, as well as providing support and training for educators. This problem must be addressed in light of the CSME and beyond with non-member states.

Another factor that potentially could harm children's education is uncertainty regarding migration. Some children about to be reunited with their parents overseas are in the "waiting to migrate" or "waiting for papers" syndrome and thus their academic performance may suffer due to lack of attendance, concentration or overall motivation at school. Since this process can be quite time consuming, it can cause considerable damage to the child's performance in the education system.³³

Health

Many health officials in the Caribbean are seriously concerned about providing primary health care to migrant children and their families. Undocumented migrants are also reluctant to access health facilities out of fear of being deported from the country. This has in particular been the concern among Haitian immigrants in the Bahamas as well as Central American migrants in Belize. There is however little evidence to support this claim.

Birth registration

Although the overall birth registration rates in the region are high and exceed the world averages, there may be gross disparities within the region, with the highest percentage of birth registration in Cuba with 100 per cent and only 70 per cent in the Dominica Republic.³⁴ There are differences within a country between rural and urban areas (see table 2). It is estimated that between 12 per cent and 35 per cent of the 11 million births in the region are undocumented.³⁵ The lack of birth registration of migrant children in the Caribbean is another issue which can significantly hinder migrant children from enjoying their full rights. These children "do not legally exist because they were not registered at birth and have no formal or official identity". Birth certificates are needed to enrol in schools and to participate in exams. The lack of birth registration can significantly limit the child's access to health care and education and further increase the risk of daily exploitation as school access and attendance have been noted to make children less vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

³³ Reis (2008), *Country Assessment report: Guyana*, UNICEF Internal Document

³⁴ UNICEF, Organization of American States and Inter-American Development Bank launch initiative to grant official identity to millions of unregistered children, Press release Aug 2006, 2009-06-05

³⁵ <http://plan-international.org/birthregistration/the-campaign/facts-and-figures>

Table 2: Birth registration rate per country

Country	% of registrated children
Belize (2006)	94
Chile (2004)	95
Cuba (2005)	100
Dominican Republic (2006)	78
Haiti (2005)	81
Jamaica (2005)	89
Suriname (2006)	97
Trinidad and Tobago (2006)	96

Source: Childinfo.org

With regards to birth registration, the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica has tried to address the issue of stateless migrant children. Children born in Dominica to Haitian parents are granted full rights including birth certificates, immunization, access to public health care, and the right to education from pre-school level upwards. This model has resulted in a positive effect on the integration of Haitians in the Dominican society.

Exposure to Child labour and trafficking

Migration, especially irregular migration, makes children increasingly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.³⁶ International Organization for Migration (IOM) research implies that the lack of education, risk awareness and “parental migration resulting in abandonment” are factors that increase the risks of trafficking. The research further identifies several countries that have particular ties to trafficking in children including the Bahamas, St Lucia, Jamaica, Guyana and Suriname. At the same time these countries were stated as being key senders or recipients of migrants or having “active internal migration patterns”.³⁷

There is evidence that “Guyanese women and girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation to neighbouring countries such as Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil, Suriname, Venezuela, and that Guyanese men and boys are subject to labour exploitation in construction and agriculture in the same countries.”³⁸ Belize, in turn, is often a transit point for children who are sent overseas for reunification with their parents. These children are considerably vulnerable to trafficking as they travel without parental company and in some cases unaccompanied. Another factor to be examined is the high number of single-headed households. In the Caribbean, for example Grenada 48 per cent of all households are headed by a single parent, and 45 per cent for Barbados, St Kitts and St Lucia respectively.³⁹ Due to the lack of resources, mothers have in some cases encouraged their daughters to engage in the sex trade.⁴⁰

There is some evidence of ‘sweet hearting’ between girls and older men, including tourists in several Caribbean countries. In Jamaica, for instance, there has been a significant growth of young females, often under the age of 18, being employed as go-go dancers within the escort services or massage parlours in the primary tourism belt of Montego Bay, Ocho Rios, Negril, Kingston and St. Andrew.⁴¹ Given the importance of the tourism industry in the

³⁶ UNICEF (2006) *Public policy issues, Migration and children*

³⁷ IOM(2005), *Exploratory Assessment of Trafficking in Persons in the Caribbean Region*, p.9146

³⁸ U.S. Department of State (2008), *Trafficking in Persons Report - Guyana*

³⁹ UNICEF Barbados (2007), *Situation Analysis of Children and Women in bthe Eastern Caribbean*

⁴⁰ Reis (2008), *Country Assessment report: Belize*, UNICEF Internal Document

⁴¹ Dunn, Leith (2002), *The Bahamas: The Situation of Children in the Worst Forms of Child Labour In a Tourism Economy: A Rapid Assessment*, ILO

region, the links between migration, commercial sexual exploitation of children and tourism need to be further explored.

Children left behind and migrant children are also both vulnerable to child labour as they pursue economic survival strategies. In Belize, for instance, many children, including migrant children from South America, participate in the informal economy by helping their parents to sell merchandise on the streets. These children are taken out of school to work become more vulnerable to abuse.⁴²

Table 3: Child Labour⁴³ in Selected Caribbean Countries

Country	Age range	Percentage	Year
The Bahamas*	not stated	2	2001
Belize**	5-14	38	2004
	12-14	29	2004
	15-17	33	2004
Guyana***	5-14	16	2006
Jamaica	5-14	8	2007
Trinidad & Tobago	5-14	4	2007

Source: United States Department of Labor, *2007 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor - Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname*, 27 August 2008. Online. UNHCR Refworld, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/48caa478c.html> [accessed 11 February 2009]

* BLCS, 2001

** ILO/IPEC Study, 2006

*** MICS3 National Household Survey, 2006

The incidence of child labour varies in the Caribbean. In Guyana, more than one in every seven (16 per cent) children is involved in child labour activities. There are clear correlations between child labour and various background variables with regards to their place of residence and wealth. Children living in the interior (36 per cent) are three times more involved in child labour activities than their coastal counterparts (13 per cent). Household wealth also seems to play an important role in whether or not a child is involved in child labour activities. The proportion of children in the poorest households (29 per cent) who are involved in child labour activities is more than seven times that of children from the richest households (4 per cent).⁴⁴ Child labour statistics for other Caribbean territories also warrant concern. However, further research will be needed across the Caribbean to make significant correlation between the incidence of child labour, school drop-out rates and migration.

The current global financial crisis could undermine efforts and even reverse gains that have been made in reducing levels of child labour in the region. Anecdotal evidence given by social workers indicates that as a result of their parent(s)' migration children engage in child work to supplement or replace household subsistence, or have to change schools.

⁴² Reis (2008), *Country Assessment report: Belize*, UNICEF Internal Document

⁴³ Child Labour is the percent of children as share of all children within a given age group that reported working in market activities.

⁴⁴ UNICEF MICS3 National Household Survey: 2006

Conclusions

Migration has long been utilised by Caribbean people as a strategy for economic survival. While remittances are significant for the majority of households in Caribbean countries, increasing evidence is showing that migration has profound negative impacts on the family, and even more on the child in particular.

Children who have been left behind as well as migrant children are placed in a particular vulnerable situation affecting their psychosocial well-being and educational performance. They are at a higher risk and more vulnerable to abuse, neglect and exploitation including sexual abuse, child labour and trafficking.

Many children left behind suffer from depressions, abandonment and low self-esteem that can result in behaviour problems such as engaging in violence and crime or running away from home. In some cases these children face a permanent struggle against feelings of low self worth, insecurity and neglect throughout their childhood and well into their adulthood. They are at increased risk to substantive health and nutritional care, poor academic performance and interruption of schooling due to additional responsibilities at home.

A particular concern for migrant children is their access to healthcare and education, especially when they are undocumented. Birth registration also forms an obstacle, especially for the Haitian population residing outside their country. Migrant children face significant language problems in school and their academic performance initially suffer.

These implications of parents' migration on children threaten the long-term well-being and development of Caribbean adolescents into productive adults. Despite the prevalence of migration in the Caribbean, there has been little discussion on the actual impact it has on the social fabric of families and communities, and even less attention has been given to the protection of children affected by migration.

Within the current economic recession and the evolvement of the wider free movement towards of nationals within the CSME, it is most likely that migration will significantly increase in the coming years. This requires a joint effort across the Caribbean to prevent negative repercussions on children. Not only is there a significant number of risks to be addressed, but also research needs to be aligned with a migration-specific agenda and policy making so that the correlation between parental absence as a consequence of migration and school drop-out rates, child labour, sexual exploitation, violence and abuse can be ascertained when data is collected.

The recommendations in this paper are meant to stimulate further debate on the impact of migration on children in the Caribbean, an issue of importance that has been under-reported in the region. Child migration must be addressed during the ongoing development of the Protocol on Contingent Rights within CARICOM that is envisioned to address the rights of moving CARICOM nationals to non-discriminatory access and entitlements regarding establishment, social services and movement of capital in host countries.

Greater South-South cooperation will be required to enhance policy and institutional coherence as well as to promote partnerships, the sharing of information on migration initiatives, social protection schemes and diverse migration experiences throughout the sub-region. A concerted effort regionally is further required to strengthen the legal framework to protect children at risk, not only from negative consequences of migration but from abuse, neglect and abandonment in general.

Recommendations

The paper has outlined a number of issues and risks that migration poses to families and in particular to the children left behind and migrating children, whether with their parent(s) or unaccompanied. By addressing some of the vulnerabilities that migration place on Caribbean families, particularly in instances where children's rights are violated, development goals are more likely to be achieved. In the articulation of policies, issues such as human rights, integration, stability and social security must be given consideration fostering the human development of migrant workers and their children. These social and political factors will have a multiplying effect so that healthy, thriving family units can develop at the levels of community, nation and region.

- 1. More research and empirical data is needed to formulate deliberate and tangible policy recommendations.**
- 2. There is a need for legal reform which is in conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ensures that newly developed legislation protects all children irrespective of their status or their country of origin's membership to the Caribbean Community.**

All Caribbean States have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and must therefore respect and ensure that the rights set forth in the Convention to each child, irrespective its status (as stipulated in Art 2). It is important to ensure that the CARICOM Protocol on Contingency Rights and national legislation cater for the protection of overseas workers and their families as well as for the family and children left behind. Independently from their legal status, overseas workers should have the possibility of staying in contact with their child(ren) and families and be able to fulfil their parental duties in the interest of their child. There is a need to secure the support and protection of children left behind or migrating unaccompanied or with their parents from countries that are not part of the CMSE and CARICOM Protocol on Contingency Rights.

- 3. Harmonized data collection on migration and its mainstreaming into socio-economic research should be strengthened**

A more concerted effort must be made with regard to collecting and sharing data on migration in order to inform national debate and design as well as assist in monitoring and evaluating the impact of migration policies. Migration should be integrated as a systematic component of research and statistics on child labour, education, school violence and sexual abuse of children, poverty in the Caribbean. This will serve as a better guide for stakeholders to ascertain the extent to which migration plays a key role in broader issues affecting children.

- 4. There is a need to review social policies fostering the fulfilment of children's right, to guarantee a broad-based access to public goods, assets and services for all children irrespective their legal status.**

The existing social protection policies and safety net schemes must be developed in order to ensure for migrants' access to social services, insurance, pension and safety nets schemes across the region. The education policies must also cater for child friendly schools that accommodate migrant children and support children left behind.

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