

Filling the Evidence Gap: Children, Adolescents & Migration

About 214 million people—3 per cent of the world's population—are living outside their country of birth. Men, women, children, adolescents and families are crossing international borders to improve their living conditions and sometimes to ensure their survival. Economic disparities, demographic change, civil wars and natural disasters have caused the number of international migrants to double between 1975 and 2010.

Although migration has been a constant in history, information remains elusive on basic issues such as how many children and adolescents participate in international migration and what differences there may be in the levels, trends and age profiles of children and adolescents migrating across borders. Questions with broader policy implications, such as what impact migration has on the well-being of migrant families, including family members left behind, have also remained unanswered.

With national and international stakeholders grappling with understanding the opportunities and costs of migration, UNICEF, UN/DESA, SU/SSC and a growing list of other partners—including civil society and governments, the World Bank, the ILO and the MacArthur Foundation—have come together to narrow the information gap. These partnerships are helping to increase the visibility of children, adolescents and women in the migration process and to provide practical tools to design and implement evidence-based policies.

Although the work is still in its early stages, it has already achieved important results: the vast leaps forward in data collection have produced a better understanding of global migration trends and of the benefits and costs of migration. Governments and other stakeholders are using this information to develop policies that make a difference in the lives of individuals, families and communities impacted by migration. The 2010 round of population censuses provides a short but unique window of opportunity for even closer collaboration—and greater results.

Three agencies are working together with governments, the international community and civil society in the South to bring the rights of children and adolescents to the forefront of migration policy and debate. This vital work is ongoing—and needs the continued support of donors and the international community for the years to come.

UNICEF

Guided by the Convention of the Rights of the Child, UNICEF is dedicated to the realisation of the rights of children affected by migration. UNICEF carries out policy research and evidence-based analyses to find practical solutions to the challenges that migration can bring to children, adolescents and women. UNICEF is strongly committed to working directly with governments and civil society to develop protective policies for children, adolescents and women affected by migration.

The Population Division of UN/DESA

The Population Division is responsible assessing a broad range of issues in the field of population. It provides the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council with high-quality documentation and provides Governments with analytical reports and information on population trends and their interrelationships with social and economic development. Further information on the activities of the Population Division in the area of international migration and development can be found on www.unmigration.org.

The Special Unit for South-South Cooperation

The Special Unit for South-South Cooperation (SU/SSC) is a semi-independent entity established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1978. Hosted in UNDP, the SU/SSC's work is broadly organized into three focus areas: fostering global South-South policy dialogue on major development issues, creating an enabling environment for South-South private sector development and business collaboration for development, and facilitating the sharing of southern development knowledge and solutions.

For further information contact:

Ms. Rhea Saab, UNICEF (rsaab@unicef.org)

Mr. Bela Hovy, UN/DESA (hovy@un.org)

Mr. Rogel Nuguid, SU/SSC (rogel.nuguid@undp.org)

Cover photo: © UNICEF/NYHQ2006-1488/Pirozzi (Philippines)
Inside photo: © UNICEF/NYHQ1998-0842/Blid Alsbirk (Jamaica)

CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND MIGRATION:

Partnering to Develop Evidence & Build Dialogue



unicef 

Working Together to Strengthen Migration Evidence

Cooperation between developing countries has sought to develop and exchange resources, technology and knowledge on how to address the needs of those impacted by migration. However, these efforts have been greatly hampered by a lack of reliable data. Giving a voice in the migration dialogue to particularly vulnerable groups—including children, adolescents and women—requires ongoing collaboration amongst UN agencies, institutions and governments to strengthen migration statistics and improve evidence-based policy making.

Ongoing initiatives by UNICEF, UN/DESA, SU/SSC, governments and civil society partners in the South have made significant strides in filling this information gap. As a first step, one of the first ever survey programs designed to collect data on migration's impact on the material and subjective well-being of children and women left behind in their home country was undertaken in 2006-7.

Global cooperation has led to the establishment of the United Nations Global Migration Database, a compilation of thousands of tabulations on the foreign-born and foreign citizens by country of origin, disaggregated by sex and age. The database has allowed users to document the scope of South-South migration—a largely undocumented area—and discover that South-South migration is in fact nearly as prevalent as South-North migration.

Today, the database includes more than 4,000 sets of tabulations from 230 countries, covering censuses since the 1970s. A recent web application to disseminate these data is available at MigrantInfo.org, a collaborative project between UN/DESA, UNICEF and the University of Houston.

UNICEF and SU/SSC have led national and regional policy dialogues that have brought together UN agencies, policy makers, government representatives and civil society to exchange information and discuss key issues related to migration and children. Efforts continue to build the capacity of governments, civil society and other stakeholders to address the vulnerability and needs of families and children affected by migration—including training in collecting and using migration data for evidence based policy making purposes.



YOUNG INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS

Several trends have emerged from the information collected on international migrant children and adolescents so far:

- **Children and youth have a low propensity to migrate.** While some 36 per cent of the global population is younger than 20 years, only 13 per cent of all international migrants are under the age of 20.
- **Developing countries host a higher proportion of young migrants.** The percentage of migrants under the age of 20 in developing countries is 18 per cent. In contrast, the percentage in developed countries is 11 per cent. Migrants under the age of 20 constitute the largest group in Africa (24%), followed by the Caribbean, Central and South America (18%), and Asia (16%).
- **Young male migrants are more likely to migrate than young female migrants.** Globally, for every 100 male migrants under the age of 20, there are 94 female migrants. Migrant females are least numerous in developing countries in comparison to developed countries. For every 100 male migrants under 20 years of age in developing countries, there are only 80 female migrants.
- **Approximately one third of all young migrants are between 15 and 19 years of age.** Among the migrants under 20 years of age, the group of 15 to 19 years is by far the largest group, accounting for some 33 per cent of all young migrants. The age group 10 to 14 represents around 27 per cent of the total migrant population under 20 years of age, followed by the age groups 5 to 9 (23%) and 0 to 4 (17%).

FILLING THE EVIDENCE GAP: CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND MIGRATION

MIGRATION'S IMPACT ON THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN LEFT BEHIND

In order to assess the impact of migration on family members left behind in countries of origin, surveys were carried out in Tirana, Albania and Quito, Ecuador, of more than 550 households, and interviews were conducted with more than 60 focus group participants. These surveys included innovative modules on health (associated with quality of life), life satisfaction, migration processes and remittances. The surveys were administered in collaboration with national statistical offices and local partners as well as with the support of UNICEF country offices, SU/SSC and ILO.

Initial results from these surveys indicate that those left behind are impacted not only materially but also in psycho-social and other non-material ways. Some lessons to be learned from these surveys include:

- **Designing flexible research programs and incorporating control groups.** In order to understand the impact of migration on well being, both migrant and non-migrant families should be incorporated in the survey design.
- **Involving national statistical offices, other UN agencies and civil society.** These partnerships were vital to the successful implementation of the pilot surveys. In both Ecuador and Albania, local partners, Observatorio de los Derechos de la Niñez y Adolescencia and the Urban Research Institute, proved to be skilled and knowledgeable collaborators in designing, implementing and monitoring the field work. These partnerships not only encouraged collaboration between stakeholders, but also increased and solidified the capacity of all partners in a creative and constructive way.