

# Migrant children in child labour: A vulnerable group in need of attention

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## ABSTRACT

This article sheds light on the underreported issue of the significant number of children on the move who end up in child labour. It builds on insights and conclusions drawn in a comprehensive literature review undertaken in 2010 (ILO-IPEC, 2010a). It follows from a recommendation made by the Inter-Agency Working Group on Children on the Move (in 2011) to analyse existing data and information from various disciplines – including child labour – for information on migrant children.

This article finds that the trajectory of the migration of children in the South is highly precarious. Without protection from the government or access to services, these children are at high risk of child labour.

The article finds further that migrant child labourers are worse off in terms of working conditions compared to local child labourers and are, thus, in need of focused attention. Migrant child labourers are among the least visible and least politically enfranchised human groups, such that employers have no incentive to provide them with proper working and living conditions. This lack of legal protection also generally translates to lower levels of health and education.

To protect migrant children, this article recommends ensuring governments' compliance with conventions, access to education, accessibility of low-interest loans, birth registration of all children and investment in preparation for migration. Furthermore, governments can improve their monitoring of migration movements, the monitoring of working conditions and the governance of migration for decent jobs with decent pay (for youth of working age).

## INTRODUCTION

An estimated 214 million persons worldwide – or 3.1 per cent of the world's population – are *international migrants* (UN, S. Zukang, 2009). This figure is dwarfed by the number of *internal migrants*, which is estimated to be 740 million (UNDP, 2009). Youth make up a disproportionate share of the world's migrants; about a third of the migrant flow from all developing countries is in the age range of 12 to 24 years (World Bank, 2006).

In addition, an estimated 215 million boys and girls around the world are engaged in child labour (ILO, 2010b) as defined in ILO Convention No. 138<sup>1</sup> and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>2</sup>

This article recognizes the desire of many children of working age to migrate legitimately. In many locations, staying in rural areas connotes some sort of unskilled agricultural labour such that, even if children are able to get jobs, they would never be able to rise from poverty. Urban centres, in comparison, offer a greater supply of jobs and relatively higher wages. In places where migration is an established way of life, success stories are real and tangible. In Thailand, older migrants return

1 ILO Convention No. 138 defines child labour as comprising regular work undertaken by children under the age of completion of compulsory education, which shall not be less than 15 (14 in exceptional situations), hazardous work undertaken by children under 18 (16 under exceptional situations) and light work undertaken by children under 13 (12 in exceptional situations).

2 Article 32 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child spells out the right to be free from economic exploitation and further refers to 'relevant international instruments' (that is, ILO C138) for the minimum age for admission to employment.

home with extra money for their parents and better clothes (ILO-IPEC, 2002a). Migrant girl workers in Tanzania report being able to have independence and material possessions because of their jobs (ILO-IPEC, 2001a). In Ecuador, girls migrate for employment because, simply, ‘the work is better’ (ILO-IPEC, 2005a).

These examples from various contexts and continents somehow indicate a relationship between migration and child labour; however, the correlation between the two has hitherto hardly been explored.

A working paper published in 2010 by the International Labour Office (ILO) pioneered the examination of the effect of internal and international migration on children’s involvement in child labour. It investigated the association between migration and child labour from the standpoints of children who migrate with their parents, independent child migrants and children left behind by migrant parents. Based on these findings, it concluded that certain forms of seasonal family migration and independent child migration tended to increase the risk of child labour and offered policy implications for the way forward. In addition, the paper also identified critical knowledge gaps and stressed the need for further analysis.

This article builds on insights and conclusions drawn in the Working Paper of 2010. It is based on a systematic review of child labour literature covering migrant-prone sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation, hazardous occupations and the urban informal economy. The article also includes a review of literature on indigenous children in child labour. Although all of the more-than-300 identified documents included some information on child migration, the focus of the analysis and corresponding text was the various types of child labour, while the migration angle was mostly neglected.

This review of secondary information was undertaken to better understand the plight of migrant children among child labourers in various types of work and determine possible patterns. While the wish of many children to migrate and their perceived benefits of migration are acknowledged, this article puts forward the following hypotheses: 1) Even though migration may offer opportunities to many, the conditions under which children in the South migrate render them particularly vulnerable to child labour; and 2) Migrant child labourers are, in terms of conditions of work, education and health, generally worse off than local child labourers. The typical profile of these migrant child labourers is also explored with special attention paid to agency, vulnerabilities to exploitation and possible protection mechanisms.

## TYPICAL REASONS WHY CHILDREN MIGRATE

Children migrate for a myriad of reasons. This desk review came across five main groups of reasons, as follows: economic push factors, education, gender and cultural reasons, personal push factors and emergencies.

### Economic push factors

Migration is most commonly undertaken due to a lack of local job opportunities for adults, which may be caused by a multitude of economic circumstances. These include the failure of

a principal industry, such as in the Philippines, where the collapse of the sugar industry forced families to migrate in search of job prospects (ILO-IPEC, 2004a); the dense concentration of the working population in certain areas, which is the case in Thailand, where 72 per cent of workers are concentrated in northeastern provinces (ILO-IPEC, 2002a); and destabilization caused by the introduction of liberal economic practices, a phenomenon which has occurred across the globe, particularly in countries like Albania (ILO-IPEC, 2007a), Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, and Mongolia (ILO-IPEC, 2008).

For migrant workers in the agricultural sector (seasonal migrants), the agency of the child labourer is less deterministic than that of his or her parents. It is most regularly the case that parents make the choice to migrate in search of employment, necessitating the upheaval of the entire family. However, even though the parents are the ones purportedly moving for work, it is an inevitable consequence that children work as well. The idea of a 'working family' is deeply entrenched in agriculture insofar as, usually, only the head of household is officially employed and paid (ILO-IPEC, 2007b). Children are informally enlisted as 'helpers,' but without their labour, it is impossible for their parents to meet their harvest quotas (ILO-IPEC, 2003a). Since entire families migrate and live and work on plantations, the ILO has observed a cycle in which 'migrant workers reproduce themselves' (ILO-IPEC, 2001a).

When children decide to migrate unaccompanied, it is commonly marked by movement from rural communities to urban areas because cities are seen as cosmopolitan and flush with opportunity. Because of this idealized vision, unaccompanied child migrants tend to relocate to the city without first securing a job. The lack of preparation and dependable income exacerbate the risks already inherent to migration, and it is a common occurrence that these children end up being exploited for their labour.

## Education

Although education is seen as a means to avoid child labour, its costs – including uniforms, books, fees and daily transportation – are often so prohibitive that it forces children to work. As such, many children in Latin America migrate during the summer months to work in hazardous environments, such as mines, or take up temporary jobs in the informal sector (ILO-IPEC, 2001b). In Peru, for instance, migration for work during the summer months is described as 'massive' (ILO-IPEC, 2007c).

Many children also migrate from rural areas to cities because of increased educational opportunities; however, in order to afford to live there, these children often must work. In villages in rural Thailand, secondary schools were rare until quite recently, compelling children to migrate to cities in order to continue their studies (ILO-IPEC, 2002a). The link between migration, education and child labour also holds in Mongolia and Cambodia, where the majority of surveyed boy domestic workers had migrated from rural areas for the purpose and hope of a better education (ILO, 2006a) and later became lured into child labour.

## Gender and culture

Migration and child labour also appear to be intertwined as a cultural fact. Even if a child purportedly migrates voluntarily, there are underlying cultural pressures at work. For instance, the capacity to work and to provide for oneself is tied to a child's worth. In Ghana, migrant work,

which gives the ability to buy basic necessities for oneself, is seen as a 'rite of passage' for girls: "A girl who has nothing is considered a disgrace and will be ridiculed" (ILO-IPEC, 2004a). In Kenya, children between the ages of 10 to 15 are 'expected' to leave their communities in order to start building their own livelihoods (ILO-IPEC, 2006b). Agency in these instances is difficult to pinpoint.

Migration is also a consequence of a contracted view of viable vocations. In particular, domestic work is seen as the only 'acceptable' career for girls or the only one that they have sufficient skills to engage in, considering that their education is prioritized below that of boys. In Ecuador, domestic work in large cities is one of the only reliable labour options available to girls (ILO-IPEC, 2004a). In the commercial sexual exploitation industry in Sri Lanka, which draws many of its workers from rural areas, most girls felt that they had less of a choice in their vocation, whereas the majority of boys engaged in this type of work were doing it voluntarily (ILO, 2005).

Jobs requiring low skills and with poor compensation are also seen as an inevitable future for many child migrants. The lack of options is particularly a problem for migrant children from indigenous groups who, by and large, have low levels of education. Migratory push factors for indigenous communities are compounded by land dispossession due to external resource extraction or commercial development (ILO-IPEC, 2007d). As such, migrant child labour in its worst forms is not only resorted to, but is, rather, 'accustomed' to (ILO-IPEC, 2010b). For indigenous migrant children in Latin America, the lack of alternatives makes hazardous work the 'fate' of their adult lives (ILO-IPEC, 2010b).

## Personal push factors

When children voluntarily migrate unaccompanied, it is in many cases the result of a traumatic family experience. When following the path that leads children to work in the commercial sex industry, one finds that the source is often physical or sexual maltreatment at home. The main concern of these children is to escape their bad family situations and leave their homes, often without support and frequently without prospects. A report from Ghana reported girls between the ages of 12 and 16 who ran away from arranged marriages and ended up working as bar assistants or sex workers (ILO-IPEC, 2004a). Likewise, in Ethiopia, 25 per cent of girls interviewed in the slum areas of Addis Ababa migrated due to the threat of forced marriage (Bartlett, 2010). In Viet Nam, of the children surveyed who migrated to a city and ended up in sexual exploitation, 40 per cent experienced family trauma at a young age (ILO-IPEC, 2002b).

## Emergencies

The 2010 Working Paper by ILO listed conflict, natural disaster and the resulting search for safety and better opportunities as a main reason why children migrate. It pointed out that internal displacement disproportionately affects children, as half of the world's 27 million internally-displaced persons are children (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2010). A study in Nepal by Save the Children pointed out that migration to cities and entry into the urban labour force is, for many, the only alternative to the risks of remaining in areas of conflict. As a consequence of working in cities, these children become highly susceptible to exploitation (Save the Children et al., 2006). Given the number of children affected by emergencies and the relative scarcity of information on the link between emergencies and child migration, it is recommended that future research on, for instance, children in armed conflict include attention to the migration dimension.

# THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH CHILDREN IN THE SOUTH TEND TO MIGRATE RENDER THEM VULNERABLE TO HARM, EXPLOITATION AND CHILD LABOUR

## At the outset of migration

The ILO Minimum Age of Employment Convention No. 138 (1973) spells out that children under 15 should not be in regular employment. Regardless, many countries in the South, particularly in Africa, are faced with the migration of children under the minimum working age, and often see them end up in child labour. As a rule, these children are without proper (or have falsified) travel documents, making them easy targets for exploitation or extortion. Due to their illegal status, these children might not dare to contact the police to report offences.

When children travel without their parents, they are much more vulnerable to harm and exploitation at all stages of migration. Parents or individuals look to recruitment agencies as a safer alternative to unaccompanied migration. The truth, however, is that recruitment, which intends to connect migrant labourers with jobs, is not always a safe choice, as it often revolves around informal networks and profit making and tends to occur at the expense of the child. It is too often the case that recruitment agencies promise a conduit to domestic work but actually siphon young girls into sex work; once in transit, falsely lured recruits do not have enough information or any means of recourse to avoid exploitation (ILO-IPEC, 2004a).

The alternative – unaccompanied migration without the assistance of a recruitment agency – renders children just as exposed to exploitation and child labour. When children migrate without proper preparation, they are at risk of trafficking or ‘disappearing’ during the journey due to poor information sharing and feedback mechanisms between urban and rural authorities (ILO-IPEC, 2009). It is also a common occurrence that children run out of money because they are ignorant about expenses and/or the hardships they would incur (Catholic Relief Services, 2009); in order to survive, these children must often resort to prostitution (ILO-IPEC, 2003b).

Another problem in preparing for migration is that the majority of migrants cannot afford the cost of migration and, consequently, look to procure funds from extremely problematic sources: Some children indenture themselves into debt-bondage situations to raise enough money to migrate (ILO-IPEC, 2003c). Loans are another source of funding for migrants; however, moneylenders often offer them at exorbitant interest rates that may reach more than 50 per cent (United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator’s Office Nepal, 2010).

## During migration

The actions involved in migration also tend to heighten the risk of exploitation and of becoming victims of trafficking. Border crossings and transport hubs such as bus and railway stations, ferry terminals and airports are recognized points of risk for trafficking into exploitation (ILO, UNICEF, UN.GIFT, 2009). In order to avoid checkpoints and immigration officials because they lack proper documentation, migrant children frequently travel at night, increasing the risk of exploitation, (ILO, UNICEF, UN.GIFT, 2009). During the migration process, intermediaries like recruitment agencies often take advantage of migrants to the extent that they provide counterfeit visas. Previously agreed-upon jobs are also replaced with ones that offer lower pay and/or are more hazardous (United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator’s Office Nepal, 2010). In situations of dependency and desperation, many children are forced to accept such unfair treatment.

## After migration

Migrating children remain at risk even after reaching their points of destination. For children who migrate alone without a pre-arranged job, finding work or housing is extremely difficult. With few resources, many migrant children end up living in the streets. In Nepal in the early 2000, the vast majority of street children in the capital city were migrants and; more than half of those migrant children left home before the age of nine (ILO-IPEC, 2002c).

Even if migrant children do manage to find work at their points of destination, their lack of local connections, improper identity documentation and general state of vulnerability make it easy for employers to take advantage of them. Because of the lack of oversight by labour inspectors in the domestic and informal labour sectors, where many urban migrant child labourers are found, it is easy for employers to abuse their positions of authority.

In summary, the trajectory of the migration of children in the South is highly precarious from the outset and continues even after children have reached their destinations. Without protection by the government and without access to services (see below), child migrants in the South have no available course of action *but* child labour.

## IMPACT OF THE LACK OF ACCESS TO SERVICES AND PROTECTION ON THE RISK OF CHILD LABOUR AMONG MIGRANT CHILDREN

### The lack of accessible education after migration

Children who migrate with their parents, who, in turn, work on seasonal agricultural plantations, are at risk of child labour because of their removal from accessible and/or free education. Even where children are not required to work, the dearth of affordable day care services gives parents no choice but to bring them to work and, consequently, expose them to the same hazardous conditions (ILO-IPEC, 2007b). If they are deemed old enough, it is inevitable for these children to work with their parents (ILO-IPEC, 2003a). Even when a government offers universal free education, migrant children often do not have access to schools without proper identity cards. For instance, in Beijing, China, the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) notes that school budgets are based on the number of officially registered local students. Because of this, even when children of migrant workers are admitted, they must pay an additional fee to compensate for the lack of government funds (ILO CEACR, 2011). As a result, only two thirds of Beijing's 370,000 migrant children were enrolled in school (ILO CEACR, 2011). Similarly in Turkey, free education is guaranteed by the Constitution, but educational opportunities were, for a long time, unavailable to migrant children at their temporary sites because they were not permanent residents (ILO-IPEC, 2003a). Education for only permanent residents is likewise the case in Mongolia (ILO-IPEC, 2008), where, until 2004, the scores of children who had migrated from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan with their parents to work in cotton fields were prohibited from attending local schools (ILO-IPEC, 2006c).



A related issue is that in rural areas, where there is simply no access to higher education, the natural track after primary school leads to entering the workforce. In Latin America and Asia, secondary schools often do not exist in rural villages, such that children must either migrate for higher schooling or – the more likely alternative – to start working, often away from home (ILO-IPEC, 2001b; ILO-IPEC, 2002a).

The quality of education offered in schools also has a large impact on keeping children in school. Indigenous children, in particular, suffer when schools are not sensitive to their needs. In Guatemala, indigenous children reported that ‘discrimination and marginalization’ by teachers and peers prompted them to drop out of school to look for work elsewhere (ILO-IPEC, 2005a). In addition, children must habitually make the trade-off between school and work, and repeated failure in school unsurprisingly leads to the idea that work is the more viable option for their future. Aside from constraints related to financing and geographical location, indigenous children are also less likely to have community or parental support for their continued educational attainment and are less likely to speak the language of instruction at school (ILO-IPEC, 2010c).

## The lack of government protection from exploitation

Non-permanent resident status and a lack of identity documents cause governments to overlook migrant children in their promulgation of work standards and protections. As a result, child migrants are more likely to be engaged in child labour.

The problem of birth registration is particularly salient for migrant child labourers. In many rural areas and some entire countries, registration at birth is not the norm. Consequently, the majority of migrant child labourers are politically invisible and powerless. Because migrant child labourers without identity documents have limited access to public services, they are often heavily dependent on their employers. That and their helplessness and ignorance about administrative procedures put them at risk of being trapped in a cycle of slave-like working conditions. Debt bondage, which ties child labourers to production, is an increasingly widespread practice in commercial agriculture; in many cases, however, these ‘debts’ are falsely imposed without any written contracts and include inflated costs of transport, food, lodging, work tools, etc. (ILO-IPEC, 2006d).

Even when migrant workers have identity cards or working papers, it is a common practice for employers to retain those documents in order to prevent them from quitting (ILO-IPEC, 2006e). In certain sectors where migrant child labourers are highly concentrated (such as domestic work and the informal economy), government protection is severely lacking due to the lack of regulation and monitoring. Another reason why few protections are provided is that child labour in the informal economy, which includes petty trading, begging, portering, etc., is not always categorized as ‘work’ (ILO and SZW, 2010). Accordingly, migrant children continue to toil unnoticed in child labour.

When governments do pay attention to migrant children, these children are often treated as illegal immigrants and are deported by force. Fear, uncertainty and a lack of recourse characterize these children’s lives.

In summary, the restriction of access to educational services leaves migrant children with no choice but to work. However, the causes for their lack of access to education render these child workers more vulnerable to exploitation in their jobs. This maintains the state of poverty that make it necessary to migrate in the first place. A lack of access to both education and government protections perpetuate the plight of child migrants in child labour.

# MIGRANT CHILD LABOURERS ARE WORSE OFF THAN LOCAL CHILD LABOURERS

In addition to the evidence presented that shows that the conditions under which children in the South migrate make them vulnerable to child labour, there is preliminary evidence to support the argument that the conditions in which they work are worse than those of local child labourers. This includes evidence that migrant child labourers work longer hours, attend school less and earn less than local child labourers.

## Working conditions

There are high proportions of migrants among child labourers in the agricultural, domestic work and urban informal economic sectors, as well as commercial sexual exploitation.

In Guatemala, children in the 12–14 age group comprise 30 per cent of internal migrants working on coffee, sugar cane, cardamom and cotton plantations (ILO-IPEC, 2006d). Where workers on plantations are inappropriately young, there are high numbers of work-related injuries and fatalities (Estes et al., 2010). The Department of Agriculture of the United States defines agriculture as the most hazardous occupation for child workers, and, yet, it is precisely that sector which, in the United States alone, includes 400,000 working children, many of whom are migrants (Romano, 2011).

In the cotton sector in India, local children work on average between 9 and 12 hours a day, while migrant children worked at least an additional 3 hours (ILO, 2004b). In the manufacturing sector in the Philippines, migrant child labourers tend to work longer hours compared to non-migrants (ILO-IPEC, 2005b).

Despite their longer work hours, migrant children do not earn more. In fact, child labourers in the manufacturing sector in the Philippines are paid 20 per cent less than local children (ILO-IPEC, 2005b).<sup>3</sup> In the tobacco industry in Kazakhstan, migrant child labourers often earned 1.5 to 2 times less than local labourers (ILO-IPEC, 2006c). In Thailand, the wage disparity is even greater, with immigrant child domestic workers earning about half the monthly salary of local child domestics (ILO-IPEC, 2006a). When children migrate solely for economic reasons, the natural tendency is to accept any kind of work (even that which is underpaid and demeaning) and to work as long as possible. This cycle of low wages and long hours is self-perpetuating.

## Bondage and being away from a protective environment

According to an ILO synthesis report, the inability to quit is a condition characteristic of the worst forms of child labour (ILO-IPEC, 2005a). In Ethiopia, more than 80 per cent of migrant child domestics surveyed reported that they do not have the right to voluntarily quit their jobs (ILO-IPEC, 2005a). In the commercial sex industry in Manila, migrant child labourers are characterized as ‘more compliant’ than their local counterparts; however, this can be linked to the fact that migrants, unlike locals, do not have the ability to just leave and go home or “hide in their relatives’ homes” when faced with unfavourable working conditions (ILO-IPEC, 2004a). Places of recourse are more limited for migrant workers due to the absence of social support and the distance that separates them from their families (ILO-IPEC, 2004a).

<sup>3</sup> Migrant child workers receive between 5.50 and 6.50 Philippine peso per thousand compared to the local wage ranging from 6.10 to 5.70 Philippine peso per thousand (ILO-IPEC, 2005b).

## Education

Even if migrant children have access to education (which they most often do not), the time and energy that working requires from them makes them too busy or too tired for study. There is a marked pattern where migrant child labourers are far less likely than local child labourers to attend school. In Ghana, the school dropout rates of migrant child labourers in seasonal agriculture are among the highest because their long working hours leave them exhausted (ILO-IPEC, 2004a). Seasonal agricultural work tends to be characterized by irregular and unpredictable hours during harvest time, such that it is inevitable that child migrants drop out. In Kazakhstan, 79 per cent of migrant children cited the need to work as the reason why they did not attend school, whereas only 11 per cent of local children responded in this manner (ILO-IPEC, 2006c). In Côte d'Ivoire, only 33 per cent of migrant child labourers on cocoa farms were enrolled in school, compared to 71 per cent of locals (ILO-IPEC, 2007e). In the pyrotechnic sector in the Philippines, children tend not to be in school at all during the peak production season between September and December (ILO-IPEC 2005b).

## Health

Adverse working and living conditions naturally lead to a lower level of health – both physical and mental – among migrant child labourers. In Kazakhstan, the greater amount of physical work and inadequate living conditions render the health status of migrant children markedly worse than that of local children (ILO-IPEC, 2004b). Furthermore, unlike their local counterparts, many migrant children have no access to public health services due to their illegal status and cannot afford private medical services; treatment for illnesses consist almost exclusively of home remedies (ILO-IPEC, 2004b).

The lack of community relations and parental oversight of child migrant labourers who have relocated by themselves renders them more vulnerable than local child labourers. Unlike local children, who have parents that are familiar with their employers, child migrants suffer from more maltreatment in the workplace. In a study of employer behaviour in Viet Nam, there were no instances of scolding, insulting or illegal punishment for local child labourers; the same could not be said for migrant child labourers (ILO-IPEC, 2009).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the prevalence of delinquency, alcohol and drug addiction and prostitution among indigenous child migrant labourers has been noted. The removal of familial support and guidance from these children are thought to render them less equipped to resist the social 'evils' that they are exposed to for the first time compared to children under parental guidance (ILO-IPEC, 2006b).

In summary, migrant child labourers are worse off in terms of working conditions compared to local children. This is because migrant child labourers are among the least visible and least politically enfranchised, such that employers have no incentive to provide proper working and living conditions. This lack of legal protection also generally translates to lower levels of health and education.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the correlation between migration and child labour has hitherto only been explored superficially. This article has argued that the link between migration and child labour is manifest, yet multifaceted. Migration is often undertaken by children and their families for the hope of a better future. The act of migration itself does not constitute a risk of child labour; rather, the conditions under which children migrate heighten that risk. For future policies to effectively address child labour, it is important that a variety of research studies from different continents suggest that migrant child labourers are worse off at work in comparison to local child labourers.

### Compliance with conventions

Several widely ratified conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) and the ILO Minimum Age of Employment Convention (ILO C138, 1973) cover child labour, and implicitly touch on the subject of migrant children. Article 2 of the UN CRC spells out that all children, including migrant children, are born with the same rights, including the right to be free from child labour.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the ILO Convention on Migrant Workers (ILO C143, 1975) stipulates in Article 1 that “Each Member for which this Convention is in force undertakes to respect the basic human rights of all migrant workers.”

Thus, it is necessary for governments to fulfil their obligations under these Conventions and ensure compliance. This implies that the rights of migrant children, including those at work, should take priority over their possible penalizations as illegal immigrants.

### Education

The cycle wherein migrant child labourers reproduce themselves needs to be broken. At the heart of this cycle are the lack of access to education and poverty that often necessitates work at the expense of education. For migrant child labourers, work is almost always unskilled and poorly compensated, such that it creates an inescapable poverty trap. In fact, many child migrants do not even have the choice between work and education because the latter is unavailable. Policymakers should rectify the problem of inaccessible and/or unaffordable education for prospective migrant children (at places of origin) and children who have migrated (at destination). In particular, they should work towards unrestrictive enrolment procedures, ensuring the proximity of school facilities to migrants’ homes and/or worksites and establishing internal support services that recognize the challenges posed by language barriers.

### Debt and loans

Given that migration is often financed through loans at exorbitant interest rates and/or situations of debt bondage, it is recommended that places of outmigration invest in loan mechanisms at affordable rates. A good practice worth mentioning is a village in Nepal where a cooperative offers

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<sup>4</sup> Article 2.1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child maintains that every child, without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his/her parents or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status is born with the same rights.

loans to migrating workers at a low interest rate guaranteed by the community (United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator's Office Nepal, 2010). The ILO has also suggested access to affordable credit for youths of working age and low-interest government loans to spur educational endeavours and delay migration for work (ILO-IPEC, 2010c).

## Birth registration

Compliance with the ILO Minimum Age Recommendation (ILO R146, 1973), which calls for public authorities to “maintain an effective system of birth registration, which includes the issue of birth certificates,”<sup>5</sup> is one way to address the problem of access to education. If every child is ensured his or her identity documents, there would be one less barrier to their enrolment in school. Furthermore, birth registration makes it easier for migrant children to become socially integrated and gain access to basic public services. This would undercut the migrant worker's reliance on his or her employer and increase the channels of available remedies.

## Increased levels of preparation

Children below the minimum working age should, where possible, be offered opportunities at source (i.e., education and training). If youth of working age would rather migrate for employment than continue their education, this should ideally only occur in conjunction with the ILO multilateral framework on labour migration through increased cooperation between governments and employers' and workers' organizations that is able to promote managed migration for employment purposes. Migration undertaken without first securing a job sows vulnerability that markedly leads to exploitation. However, the urge to migrate even without job prospects is often so strong that it would be more realistic to instead address the lack of preparation that often leads to child labour. Along these lines, it is advised to target communities where migration for work is more common than in others and offer pre-departure training services, including life skills training, along with vocational training tailored to the needs of prospective employers.

## Monitoring migration movement

Increased security along the main migration routes would likely decrease the number of children who 'disappear.' Thailand offers an interesting case in which village buses shuttle migrant youth workers to and from Bangkok two or three days a week; the bus drivers are trusted villagers themselves, and so youths can travel alone safely and return when they wish (ILO-IPEC, 2002a). A readily available way to return home for migrant child labourers will mitigate the problem of child migrants who run out of money along the way and have to resort to hazardous work in order to survive.

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5 Article 16 of ILO Minimum Age Recommendation No. 146.

## Law enforcement and monitoring of working conditions

Governments need to work towards better oversight of recruitment practices and working conditions so as to better protect the rights of migrants, including migrant children. Increased scrutiny of the practices of recruitment agencies would deter those who use it as a cover for exploitation and/or merely look to it as a moneymaking scheme, and would ensure that they do not overcharge or misinform would-be migrants.

Government oversight should increase in industries where there are many child labourers working in hazardous conditions, such as in domestic work and agriculture. Due to the informal nature of these kinds of work, protection for migrant children has been minimal at best. The recently adopted ILO Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189, 2011) offers promising opportunities to improve protection in at least one sector. For improved oversight, inspectorates should expand in size, be knowledgeable about child labour, and speak the language of migrant workers who are commonly engaged in that type of work.

## Improved governance of migration for decent jobs with decent pay

Given current demographics and economic inequities in a globalized and interconnected world, migration – including that of children – will surely continue to happen. There is, thus, a crucial need for policymakers to work towards better local alternatives for children in need, while governing the conditions under which migration occurs, and ensuring that the end result is a decent job with decent pay for youth of working age. If policies as described here are left unchanged, the problematic link between migration and child labour would persist.

## Future research

For responsive policies to address issues pertaining to migration and child labour, it is crucial that we continue to improve our understanding of both phenomena and the relationship between them. Future research on social issues (including child labour) should, therefore, systematically include a focus on migration – with data disaggregated by internal versus external migration, independent versus family migration, and birth registration – while research on migration should systematically include attention to children, including those below the minimum working age.

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