

# **Global Report on Migration and Children**

## **CHILDREN AND WOMEN LEFT BEHIND IN LABOR SENDING COUNTRIES: AN APPRAISAL OF SOCIAL RISKS**

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# **CHILDREN AND WOMEN LEFT BEHIND IN LABOR SENDING COUNTRIES: AN APPRAISAL OF SOCIAL RISKS**

## **Executive Summary**

The present paper analyzes whether and how permanent international migration reduces or increases vulnerability and risk of children in left-behind households. It is based on secondary data sources regarding country evidence and case studies. It examines country reports from the UNICEF-UNDP initiative, and policy and academic literature on migration.

The empirical research on migration's impacts on children and on gender relationships, roles and dynamics is still in its infancy, the evidence is sometimes contradictory and country specific.

Migration involves the migrants as well as other members of the household in a complex set of relationships linking migrants with those left behind. Assessing migration's impacts on left behind children requires understanding the causes and characteristics of their parents' migration; the reasons why these children were left in the community of origin. The analysis should consider the role of social, economic and political institutions in the parents' decisions and in shaping the impacts on children.

Migrant mothers' households differed from those with migrant fathers; the former relied more often on extended family members which took care of the left-behind children more often. In migrant households with migrant mothers, children were more often in charge of other family members rather than the father. The evidence on changes in traditional gender roles and women's empowerment is still limited for arriving to general conclusions; case studies in countries where women have limited access to work outside their homes show that migration by itself does not change prevailing power relations. But there are also examples of increased independence of these women. Migration can set off the process of women's empowerment, but this outcome is influenced by the characteristics of the community of origin, of the women themselves, and of the migration process itself.

Both in the debate and in the design of policies concerning migration there is a dearth of the social dimensions of migration, analyzing the relationships between social policy, social protection and migration in the sending regions. Policy and programme interventions need to recognize the specificity of left behind children's problems.

The main challenge for UNICEF is that policies specifically designed for protecting children and women in left behind households could create or reinforce inequalities within sending communities, as well as prejudiced images of members of migrant households as 'different', or even privileged.

## Introduction

International migration, traditionally viewed as rooted in adverse development in the sending regions, is increasingly seen as a tool towards development (Black and King, 2004). The debate on the migration-development links is still open: While there is abundant work stressing the positive impacts of migration in sending countries' development there is also copious research raising doubts on these links (Docquier and Marfouk, 2005; Portes, 2006; Delgado Wise, 2006).<sup>1</sup>

Migration is moving up the global development agenda but its wide-ranging implications for children have received little attention so far. Migration involves the migrants as well as other members of the household in a complex set of relationships linking migrants with those left behind. As migration and mobility become extended phenomena, their impacts on the left behind are still an unanswered question. The term "left behind" is also problematic; it can be interpreted as those who missed out on the opportunity to migrate, or either as those who could not be brought along and were somehow 'abandoned' (Yeoh, 2007).

The 2006 UNICEF-UNDP desk review on remittances and children<sup>2</sup> examined the impacts of remittances on children and women in migrant households in sending countries. Case studies in areas of high out-migration found that parents' migration entailed risks for children affecting their rights, which could not be offset by remittances. The report stressed the need to improve the existing knowledge on the risks for children's rights in migrant households in order to provide sound basis for policy design. In this direction UNICEF-UNDP launched a joint research effort produced in 2006 country reports from Mexico and Moldova on migration's impacts on children in migrant households on the basis of quantitative and qualitative surveys.<sup>3</sup>

Migration problems affecting children will be examined in this paper in the broader perspective of children's rights, which allow including those excluded within community life and the existing institutions (Freeman, 1997). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) protects every child, regardless of nationality or immigration status, and outlines states' obligations towards every child in their jurisdiction, regarding among others, the right to a nationality, the highest attainable standard of health, education, and the right to be free from discrimination, exploitation, and abuse. Protection concerns arise from lack of parental care, separated children and linkages with trafficking, recourse to institutionalization and child labour.

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<sup>1</sup> These authors mention brain-drain and population depletion as some of the negative impacts of migration in sending countries.

<sup>2</sup> See Cortes (2006).

<sup>3</sup> This UNICEF-UNDP joint effort is currently working on pilot surveys in Ecuador and Albania which will provide in-depth information on migration and remittances impacts on children's rights in left-behind households. In February 2007 UNICEF Ecuador office co-sponsored a Workshop on Migration and Children. The Workshop was organized jointly by UNICEF and CEPLAES Ecuador, with the support of UNDP, UNFPA, and IOM, and the participation of the local and central government of Ecuador.

The present paper analyzes whether and how permanent international migration<sup>4</sup> reduces or increases vulnerability and risk of children in left-behind households. It is based on secondary data sources regarding country evidence and case studies. It examines the country reports, and the policy and academic literature on migration. The first section presents the more salient migration theories; sections 2 and 3 examine UNICEF-UNDP research results and the literature on migration impacts on children and women. Section 4 discusses the more salient government and UN organizations policy initiatives. Section 5 summarizes the conclusions, while policy recommendations are depicted in the last section.

## 1. Migration Theories: An overview

The new economics of labour migration (NELM) (see Taylor, 1999; Massey, 1999; Stark, 1991; Stark & Bloom, 1985) and structuralism (see, Sassen, 2005; Delgado Wise, 2006; Portes, 2006) are the main contributors to the academic and policy debate on the links between migration and development. The following sections give an overview of their more salient features, focusing on their contribution to understanding the dynamics of migration and its impacts on left-behind children and women in sending countries.

The debate between the two theories was and still is polarized between optimistic and pessimistic views on the migration-development links: on the one hand NELM supporters argue that migration, driven by household rational decisions, sets in motion a dynamics towards development in sending regions (Taylor, 1999). On the other, structuralists sustain that migration is a consequence but also a cause of underdevelopment in sending regions, contributing to depopulation and scarcity of skilled among other negative impacts (Portes, 2006).<sup>5</sup>

The New Economics of Labour Migration and structuralism have contributed to the understanding of the situation of children and women in left-behind children; however there is still a dearth of empirical studies specifically dealing with the issue. NELM analyses focus on the household, although subsuming children and women under the model of unified household in the migration process. Their concern with migration's impacts is mainly centred on income changes and their consequences in left-behind houses. Researchers of this school share the view that migration can improve both household and country income, while leading to development and elimination of disparities.<sup>6</sup> This idea is behind Pritchett's argument sustaining that migration was to be considered as the Millennium Development Goals "plan B" (cited by de Haan, 2006).

Structuralism examines the flows of labour between sending and receiving countries, and points at the problems of the second generation youth in host countries, contributing to making visible the issue of 'downward assimilation' (Portes, 2006). This

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<sup>4</sup> The present review concentrates on permanent migration, although it also examined empirical research temporary migration in the case of rural Pakistan, where the average duration of migration is 8 years (Mansour, 2006:11).

<sup>5</sup> Portes (2006) argues that in the debate economists generally support the optimistic stand while sociologists and anthropologists embrace the pessimistic camp more often.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank economists share these views (see, de Haan, 2006).

concept denotes the trajectory of immigrants' children who incorporate the norms and values of marginal groups in the host society – abandoning school, participating in gang activities, for example.

### **1.1. The New Economics of Labor Migration: from individual to households' strategies**

Early neoclassical theories of migration focused on the causes of rural-urban migration. Harris & Todaro (1970) examined the determinants of internal migration flows, assuming that migration decisions were made by rational, well informed individuals seeking utility maximization. Wage differentials between receiving and sending areas, as well as migrant's expectations for higher earnings in host countries explained population movements (Todaro, 1969). Migration contributed to equalizing income between regions and was an important factor leading to economic growth and modernization, supplying labour from the rural areas for the growing urban industrial sector. Harris & Todaro (1970) added that the *expected* wage caused migration even if migrant workers often did not actually increase their earnings in the host country.

In the 1980s and 1990s, neoclassical economists broadened their concerns to the study of international migration and its impacts on economic development in labour sending areas. In this framework migrants travelled to countries with higher wages, before estimating the costs and benefits of moving (Borjas, 1989). However their model did not contemplate remittances and their impact on sending regions (see Taylor, 1999).

The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) included the role of household and community strategies as well as networks into neoclassical approaches to migration. Households were seen as the principal agents in the migration process, which in turn was viewed as part of the strategies of economic improvements (Taylor, 1999; Massey, 1999; Stark, 1991; Stark & Bloom, 1985). One of the initiators of NELM, Jacob Mincer, (1978:749) argued that the migration process is shaped by household composition rather than by isolated individuals, as family ties may deter or foster migration.<sup>7</sup>

Migration represented one of various possible household strategies to secure income through the money sent back home by migrants working abroad (remittances), helping rural families to survive economically. NELM theories assumed a rational actor seeking to cope with market failures by moving overseas and sending regular remittances or lump-sum transfers (Massey, 1993:3), while providing schooling for their children, or even insurance for their future (Brown, 1997; Stark, 1991). Brown and Poirine (2005) on the basis of original survey data from Australia found that migrants sought to secure their children's schooling as well as their elders' retirement in economies lacking state insurance. Stark and Taylor (1991) drawing from a representative sample surveyed a village in Michoacan found that relatively worse-off households migrated abroad, while than those better off (in income terms) chose internal migration. That is, relative

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<sup>7</sup> He argued that the presence of school-age children generally deterred women from migrating.

deprivation was more relevant than absolute poverty in inducing households' decisions to migrate to the United States.<sup>8</sup>

Families also developed strategies for minimizing and diversifying risks; and to these ends networks had a central role (Katz & Stark, 1986). Migrant networks structured migration; they were conceived as sets of interpersonal ties linking migrants and non-migrants in origin and destination areas (Tilly & Brown, 1967; Hugo, 1981). Networks were useful helping migrant workers finding jobs in their destination, and reducing the costs of migration (Massey, 1990). These include money, information, search, opportunity and psychological costs, which are allegedly reduced if and when future migrants are connected in the country of destination. Their extension to other family members reduces the risks of movement of the migrants' relatives. A number of studies have tested the hypothesis that households send some members abroad for diversifying income sources and reducing risks, while providing some forms of social protection.<sup>9</sup>

The critical review of NELM theories contributed to make visible the situation of women and children within migrant households. NELM critiques have focused on different aspects: the 'model' of household and network composition and dynamics, the 'optimistic' view of migration's impacts on income equalization and poverty alleviation. Feminist scholars have developed critiques to NELM's analysis of the causes of migration concerning the characterization of the household and the role of gender in migrant networks (Folbre, 1986; Chant, 1998). These critiques reject the idealized notion that households are unified entities in which members collaborate on equal basis for common interests, and propose a model of household where its members have competing interests, rights, obligations and resources. Folbre (1986:5) posits that NELM overlooks the importance of conflict and inequality within the household, by assuming unrealistically cooperative bonds between family members, and obscuring age and gender power relations.

Regarding networks critics argue that these channels can also transmit distorted information, picturing an idealized scenario in the host country, and misleading potential migrants (Gosh, 2000). Besides, that NELM over stresses cooperation among members as well as the equalizing effects of networks. Research in the area of Oaxaca, Mexico, found that networks in indigenous rural areas helped next of kin, but very rarely provided assistance to non family members. Not all potential migrants were able to access networks and had to rely on their own families for obtaining resources for their trip. Money lenders charge high interests, and when migrants fail to pay, their families are accountable for the debts. In the communities there are mechanisms of social protection which often exclude the poorest. Migrant networks may also create and foster

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<sup>8</sup> These authors conclude that these conclusions have policy implications: a more equal income distribution could deter international migration, while fostering internal migration (Stark & Taylor, 1991:17).

<sup>9</sup> Quantitative studies in India, (Rosenzweig & Stark 1989), Botswana (Lucas & Stark, 1985, Stark & Lucas 1988), Peru (Cox *et al.* 1998), and in western Mali (Gubert 2002) found that households sought security through migration (from Hamid, 2007).

exploitative relations: in different countries, migration “brokers” use networks to offer their services to organize illegal border trespassing (Escobar Latapi, 2005).<sup>10</sup>

Women are often excluded from male networks; in Bangladesh migrants’ networks exclude women, and besides, actively install the cultural idea of sex segregation, jeopardizing women’s access to paid employment and migration. Using data from the Princeton University Mexico Migration Project (MMP), Cerrutti & Massey (2001) found that women’s migration from Mexico to the US was scarcely linked to networks. The study examined the timing of males and females moves northward in 50 Mexican sending communities; they found that women almost always followed other family members, either the husband or a parent; only a tiny minority initiated migration independently.<sup>11</sup>

And even when networks work swiftly, they facilitate migration in large scale; in Mexico demographers found that in areas of high out-migration networks fostered population depletion (Portes, 2006).

Regarding the alleged impact of migration on income equalization, empirical research shows that migration can exacerbate inequality. Lipton (1980) found that rural-urban internal migration in many cases increased inequalities within and between villages of origin. This author argued that as migrants are not the worse off, migration tends to improve further their living conditions, increasing inequality. His observations led him to sustain that the initial income inequalities in labour sending areas were reinforced by migration. Poor migrants generally failed to generate extra income or skills, while migration of the better-off tended to generate income, increasing pre-existing inequalities between poor and well-off families. Rural-urban migration allowed the better-off to advance as a group, while the poor migrants’ households remained poor. These conclusions were obtained from the review of different cases showing that income equalization did not take place.<sup>12</sup>

In a study on the inequality effects of remittances in Nicaragua, Barham & Boucher (1995) show that it is not possible to arrive at general conclusions on the equalizing income impact of migration on either household or country levels. Black *et al.* (2005) review of the empirical literature on migration-inequality links found mixed results; research showing both of migration increasing and decreasing inequality.

## 1.2. Structuralism

Structuralists centre their analysis of the causes of migration in macro economic and social global processes which produce inequalities between rich and poor countries,

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<sup>10</sup> Escobar Latapí conducted a survey and qualitative research, using a statistical simple of migrant and non migrant households in 31 communities and rural locations in 16 states in Mexico during four years (Escobar Latapí, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> They estimated logit and probit models of women and men’s migration determinants (Cerrutti & Massey, 2001:2).

<sup>12</sup> Lipton cites studies from Tanzania, Thailand, and Philippines, showing that migration was easier for the better-off, who were able to lower the costs and benefit from migration (Lipton, 1980:5). Kanbur & Rapoport (2005) found empirical evidence that migration does not diminish income inequalities between regions.

as well as in the population. Social stratification, globalization, wage differentials and the mechanization of labour in sending countries create “structural imbalances”, which trigger international migration (Portes & Walton, 1989). Within this perspective international migration is the consequence of existing inequalities, and at the same time it will produce further inequalities, such as human capital deficit and underdevelopment in sending areas (see, Goss & Lindqvist, 1995). From this perspective structuralists point that NELM economists, by stressing the role of perceived wage differentials, neglect the importance of economic, social and institutional contexts which influence migrants’ decisions (Portes, 2006).

Among these macro influences structuralists include the labor demand from developed nations, the increased supply of low-skilled labour from sending countries, as well as cultural processes influencing migration decisions. The first factor concerns the structural labour needs of industrialized economies, which create a permanent demand of low-skilled, low-income workers (Piore, 1979). Globalization and neo-liberal economic reforms in sending countries, allegedly increased unemployment and triggered emigration of low-skilled workers towards rich countries (Sassen, 2005). Portes (2006:9) highlights the economic and cultural subordination of labour sending countries, where new consumption expectations are not matched by distribution in economic resources, which in turn fosters population flows towards rich countries.

Free-trade agreements are also seen as causes of cross-border flows of services, information and professional workers. Delgado Wise & Covarrubias (2006) explain recent increases in Mexican emigration through increased demand in the U.S. for low-wage labour in the manufacturing and agriculture sectors. They argue that migration from Mexico was encouraged by the North American Free-Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which reduced Mexico’s capacity to implement protective policies towards local manufacturing and subsequently increased unemployment in many regions of the country.

Different authors point at migration’s impacts in Mexico which discourage economic and social reforms, and contribute to continuing out-migration (Delgado Wise & Garcia Zamora 2003; Garcia Zamora, 2003). These authors posit that migration reduces pressures on the labour market, as without migration unemployment would be higher. In poor households remittances disincentive claims to the state; in this respect migration helps replacing state obligations concerning public investment in infrastructure and universal social services (García Zamora, 2003).

Early structuralist research focused on first-generation migrants in host countries, while more recently interest has concentrated on second-generation children (Gray *et al.*, 1996; Portes & Macleod, 1996). Their emphasis lies on the latter, rather than on children and adults in left-behind households.

Concluding, the review of the NELM-Structuralist debate around international migration’s determinants and impacts, although still unsettled, shows that there is scarce research on the left behind. Concerning impacts in sending countries, the new economics of labour migration has emphasized migration’s developmental and income equalizing impacts, and their optimism is constantly being renewed (see, World Bank, 2006; Ratha, 2003). As NELM stresses the unity of household decisions, the situation of children in left behind household has remained tapped, almost invisible. Except for the research

focused on remittances' impacts on schooling and health-care patterns children in migrant households. Structuralists seek identifying the negative demographic consequences of migration for the sending regions, while pointing at the social consequences of migration on children and youth in the host countries.

The following sections examine research and country reports focusing on migration's impacts on left-behind children.

## **2. Social Dimensions of Migration: Girls and boys in Left-Behind Households**

Parents' migration requires changing previous arrangements concerning the division of care and other domestic responsibilities within the left-behind households (Pessar & Mahler, 2003; Leavitt & Glick, 2004). The nature of these changes varies with the duration of migration, and the characteristics of the sending community,<sup>13</sup> among other factors. The literature on migration has dealt mainly on different aspects of the economic impacts of migration on the household; few studies have looked at the changes operated in the household structure, or at the links and relationships between absent parents and left-behind children.

Assessing migration's impacts of migration on left behind children requires understanding the causes and characteristics of their parents' migration; the reasons why these children were left in the community of origin. In this respect, the analysis should consider the role of social, economic and political institutions in the parents' decisions and in shaping the impacts on children. In this direction Yeoh (2007) argues that the links between migrants and the left behind requires taking into account a broader institutional context. Concerning the determinants of the departure, the decision to send certain members and not others does not emerge exclusively from decisions within the household; for example restrictive migration policies or limited access to basic welfare in host countries can deter family migration. On the other hand the living conditions of the remaining members of the household are influenced not only by migration but also by the prevailing conditions in the area.

There is a growing (renewed) interest in the analysis of the relationships between migrant parents abroad and their children at home, and of the ties connecting migrants with their communities (Yeoh *et al*, 2007; Levitt & Glick, 2004). This transnationalist perspective studied the emergence of boundaries between family members living apart, which include communication between spouses, the organization of work tasks when family members are distant, negotiations over the duration of migration and around family life upon return, among other links (see, Pessar & Mahler, 2003).

In Mexican communities with high out-migration in migrant households, living transnationally is seen as the norm by its members (Sorenson & Olwig, 2002; Kandel & Massey, 2002). Sustaining the relationships between absent parents and children can become a difficult task. Research in the Philippines identified some of the challenges

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<sup>13</sup> Household tasks are heavier in communities deprived of public social services.

posed by this separation (Parrenas, 2004).<sup>14</sup> The frequency and methods of communication were not homogenous across migrant households: they depended on the economic means of migrants, on the location (rural or urban) of the families, and on the gender of the parent in charge of the household.

Migrant mothers' households differed from those with migrant fathers; the former relied more often on extended family members which took care of the left-behind children more often. This finding coincides with that of other studies in the Philippines and in Sri Lanka (see, Bryant, 2005:3; Save the Children, 2006:4; Scalabrini Migration Center, 2003), showing that in migrant households with migrant mothers, children were more often in charge of other family members rather than the father. In Sri Lanka the caregivers were close relatives, with a majority of grandmothers.

However there is little evidence on how children cope with their migrant parents' absence, and on how their own livelihoods are affected. Bryant (2005) reviewed the literature on the Philippines finding mixed results regarding the impacts of parents' migration on children. He found that part of the studies showed that parents' remittances were spent in children's education, or that these children's health indicators were better than those of children in non migrant households. But other set of studies arrived to different conclusions, indicating that the negative impacts of parents' absence jeopardized educational achievements (see, Bryant, 2005).

Lu & Treiman (2007) reviewing the literature on left-behind children's educational outcomes in developing countries found similarly mixed patterns: on the one hand some studies showed positive effects on schooling and school performance (Curran *et al.*, 2004; Jones, 1995; Lu, 2005; Taylor, 1987), while on the other, empirical research found that parental absence has negative effect on children' schooling (Battistella & Conaco, 1998; Kandel & Kao (2001).

Both Bryant reviewing the Philippines' research, and Lu & Treiman researching children in migrant households in South Africa argue that the lack of robust conclusions stems from the use of flawed methodologies. Bryant indicates that these studies are based on small-scale surveys, applied to different sets of children; Lu & Treiman share this critique positing that these small samples are from very specific communities and are mainly descriptive. They both stress the need for panel studies for obtaining a dynamic view of children's situations before and after migration took place.

A survey in Sri Lanka conducted in 1,200 households with migrant parents which were absent for more than six months (Save the Children, 2006)<sup>15</sup> investigated school attendance and performance of three groups comprising children of migrant mothers, children with mothers working in Sri Lanka, and children of non-working mothers, all from the same socioeconomic background. The research was based on a statistical

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<sup>14</sup> Parrenas (2004) conducted in depth interviews with children in migrant households on the basis of unsystematic sample of interviewees in one area of the Philippines.

<sup>15</sup> The survey was based on a representative sample comprising 1.5% of the total number of female labour migrants with children in two districts of high out-migration. In addition to the household sample, the study included a sample survey of 400 children in three age groups (below 5 years, 6-14 years and 15-17 years). The study also included 200 families in the Colombo district where mothers were working in Sri Lanka (100) and mothers were not working (100); both groups being in the same socio-economic background as that of migrant mothers.

sample, and compared between children in migrant and non migrant households. It found that children of migrant mothers performed worse<sup>16</sup> – with lower scores - than those children of the two control groups. Researchers related these outcomes with the impacts of mothers' absence on children's psychological wellbeing (Save the Children, 2006:6).<sup>17</sup>

Adults in charge of children often face increased responsibilities without having the necessary tools to overcome new challenges posed by migration. The absence of a breadwinner can increase the work burden for remaining family members and family separation can have other disruptive effects (Scalabrini Migration Center, 2003). Interviews with caregivers in the Sri Lanka Save the Children research revealed that on average 20 percent of children of all ages showed certain negative behaviour after their mother's departure. And even if some of them had developed strong ties with the caregivers, they still missed their mother.

Anthropological case studies, surveys and focus groups in Ecuador, Mexico, Moldova and the Philippines<sup>18</sup> found that in some communities, children from migrant parents can be negatively judged, or even stigmatized. In Ecuador, a research in the Southern provinces<sup>19</sup> (Herrera & Carrillo, 2002) found that urban middle classes viewed migrants as social 'climbers', and this negative views extended to the latter's children. Besides, the media transmitted an image which associates migrants with illegal trafficking and 'coyoterismo'.<sup>20</sup> Remittances' money in hands of children is also criticized by teachers and caregivers, as found in focus groups in Moldova, Mexico and Ecuador.<sup>21</sup>

## **2.1. Children left behind: estimates of its magnitude**

There are many difficulties in estimating the numbers of children affected by the out-migration of one or both parents correctly. National statistics use different calculation methods which makes international comparisons almost impossible. Furthermore, seasonal migrant workers are underrepresented in statistics, even if in countries such as for example the Ivory Coast, one third of the population are migrants (Whitehead & Hashim, 2005).

The information available does not always allow differentiating international from internal migration. This is, for example, the case in Africa, where migration rates are particularly high in rural areas. In South Africa, 25 percent of all households have members who are migrant workers and this percentage increases to over 40 percent for households in rural areas (Whitehead & Hashim, 2005:11). In Tanzania, more than half

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<sup>16</sup> Educational performance was assessed with examinations in Mother tongue, Maths and English, while school attendance was measured through school registers for the last semester.

<sup>17</sup> The document presents the negative psychological effects of mothers' absence on children after mothers' departure. Among other effects: loss of appetite, tantrums, and others.

<sup>18</sup> To be examined in detail in section 2.2.

<sup>19</sup> Herrera & Carrillo (2002) surveyed and conducted in-depth interviews with children of migrants, teachers and caregivers in two provinces with high incidence of out-migration.

<sup>20</sup> This is the term used for the smugglers of migrants both in Mexico and in Ecuador.

<sup>21</sup> See Herrera & Carrillo, 2002; Carrillo, 2004 for Ecuador and UNICEF Moldova, 2006; Garcia Zamora, 2006, for Mexico.

of all rural households have a member who migrates. In rural Mali, this share reaches 80 percent. In rural Bangladesh, between 14 and 40 percent of all households have at least one member working abroad.

Bryant (2005) suggest that 3-6 million children have been left behind by Filipino parents working overseas; the equivalent figure for Indonesia is something like one million, and for Thailand half a million. These numbers imply that roughly 10-20 per cent of Filipino children, and 2-3 per cent of Indonesian and Thai children, have a parent overseas. A 2005 UNICEF-UNDP study in Philippines estimated the numbers of children left behind by one or both parents. Using data from the Population Census, Coronel & Unterreiner (2005) estimated that one million and half mothers and one million two hundred Filipino fathers lived abroad, which represented 16 percent of households; at an average family size of three children by family nearly eight (8) million children were left behind, whereas the 2003 Children and Families Survey<sup>22</sup> projected that 91,790 families of deployed migrant workers have left a child in the 10 to 12 years age group behind.

Nobles (2006) uses multistage life tables with data from the Mexican Family Life Survey to examine the contribution of migration to children's time apart from their fathers. Other common sources of parental household absence, such as divorce, non-union fertility, and death are considered as well. Results suggest that more than a third of Mexican children experience some type of household disruption during childhood. As a population, Mexican children spend nearly equal amounts of time living with a single mother following a father's migration as they do living with a single mother following union dissolution. Additionally, 7 percent of Mexican children in 2002 have migrating fathers, yet multistage estimates suggest that 17 percent of children born into two-parent homes are expected to experience a migrating father at least once during childhood.

Between 1990 and 2000 the number of children with migrant parents increased from 17 to 150 thousand in Ecuador. 36 percent of migrant women and 40 percent of migrant men left their children in Ecuador. In 2005, 218 thousand girls and boys had at least one parent living abroad (UNICEF Ecuador, 2007).

For Moldova, there are no precise statistics on the exact number of children left-behind. There are some quantitative and qualitative estimates on the children remaining behind Moldovan migrants, but in most of the cases the estimates are not convergent, while the methodological quality of the studies is not known (see, Prohnițchi, 2005). Estimates indicate that between 2000 and 2004 the proportion of children up to 14 years old left-behind by migrating parents increased from 16 to 31 percent (UNICEF, 2006). In the 10-14 age group, 14,5% had migrant mothers, 15% migrant fathers, and 6,6% had both parents away. In August 2006, the parents of 177,195 children aged 0-18 were working abroad, while 80% of the children resided in rural areas. The Ministry of Education of Moldova reported that almost 65 institutions hosted orphans or abandoned children between 7 and 12 years old, a significant share of which was left behind by migrating parents (UNICEF-Moldova, 2005).

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<sup>22</sup> The study involved 1,443 children aged between 10 and 12 years of migrant and non-migrant parents. The children came from seven provinces/areas in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao: the National Capital Region, Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna, Cebu, Negros Occidental and Davao del Sur (see, SMC, 2004; Yeoh & Lam, 2007).

Kuhn (2006), using data from the 1996 Matlab Health and Socioeconomic Survey estimated that in Bangladesh 91% of the 5,930 children aged between five to 14 have one migrant parent (mainly fathers) away. Another 2% of the sample has neither parents living in the household. Finally, Save the Children's 2006 research on Sri Lanka,<sup>23</sup> estimated that approximately one million Sri Lankan children left behind by their mothers.

The proportion of single or divorced women who left children in Ecuador was higher than that of men; children were left with their maternal grandparents, while migrant men left them mainly with their female spouses (Camacho, 2006). A 2005 survey<sup>24</sup> shows that 36 percent of women and 39 percent of men have left at least one son or daughter in Ecuador. Table 1 displays in the first two columns the numbers of migrant men and women who have left their children in Ecuador and the number of children they left behind. The last column shows the numbers of children left by migrant parents, which totalled 218,704 in 2005.

**Table 1. Ecuador: Left-behind children under 18 years old by Men and Women**

No. of children	Migrant Men Leaving Children (a)	Migrant Women Leaving Children (b)	Total Migrants leaving children (c)	Total Children Left behind (d)
1	22,777	21,445	44,222	44,222
2	21,820	14,805	36,625	73,250
3	9,090	5,279	14,369	43,107
4	3,249	2,125	5,374	21,496
5	2,505	1,282	3,787	18,935
6	2,013	936	2,949	17,694
<i>TOTAL</i>	61,454	45,872	107,326	218,704

Columns (a) and (b) show the numbers of migrant men and women leaving children; Column c) is the sum of columns (a) and (b). Column (d) shows the numbers of children left behind.

Source: INED-SIEH, Encuesta de Empleo, December 2005

<sup>23</sup> Save the Children (2006); the survey design was described above, in section 2.1.

<sup>24</sup> INEC-SIEH survey in 2005.

**Table 2. Ecuador: Migrants by gender, country of destination and children in Ecuador**

MEN	USA	Spain	Italy	Others	<i>TOTAL</i>
Left children*					
Yes	36	44	35	26	39
No	64	56	65	74	61
<i>TOTAL</i>	100	100	100	100	100
WOMEN	USA	Spain	Italy	Others	<i>TOTAL</i>
Left children*					
Yes	27	43	45	4	36
No	73	57	55	96	64
<i>TOTAL</i>	100	100	100	100	100

\* Under 18

Source: UNFPA-FLACSO (2006).

According to official information released by the Moldovan Ministry of Education, there were registered 22976 children of school age left by both parents that had migrated abroad in December 2003. It is not clear which interval spans the definition “school age,” whether this is the age 6-14 (incomplete secondary education) or 6-18 (lyceum). In any case, this number has increased and in January 2005, the new figure registered represented 27,951 children. No information was available regarding the number of children aged 0-6 left behind by migrating parents, although, according to the 2005 moldova demographic health survey, one fifth are under five years (see, table 3).

**Table 3: Moldova: School-Age Children Left Behind by Migrant Parents**

	2004/05 academic year*	2005/06 academic year**	% change 2005/06 to 2004/05
Children left behind by one parent	68,161	85,978	+26
Children left behind by both parents	27,951	33,157	+19
Children that migrated with their parents	3,711	5,236	+41
Children who abandoned school (after first semester***) because of migration of one or both parents	49	70	+43
Total school-age children affected by migration	99,872	124,441	+25

\* Data as of November 2004; \*\* Data as of November 2005; \*\*\* refers to 2005/06 academic year only  
Source: Compiled based on statistics by the MEYS submitted to the National Bureau of Migration. From UNICEF Moldova field office report.

## 2.2. Country-based findings

The following sections summarize main research findings on the impact of migration in selected countries from the literature and from UNICEF country offices' reports. Moldova UNICEF office conducted a study investigating the situation of children with one or both parents working abroad, with a qualitative perspective.<sup>25</sup> Mexico UNICEF office conducted interviews with spouses of migrants, teachers and community members on children's performance in three communities of three states with high out-migration, also in 2006.<sup>26</sup>

### 2.2.1. Education

#### Mexico

Studies conducted in Mexico suggest that the reception of remittances has generally facilitated children's access to schooling (Borraz, 2005; López 2005). Kandel & Kao (2001) explore the effects of international migration on children's education, analyzing the effects of parents' permanent migration and children's temporary stays abroad on school performance.

These authors utilize a unique data set from stratified random sample of 7600 grammar, junior high, and high school-level students in a state capital (Zacatecas), and 25 rural communities. They argue that few studies on the impact of migration on education in Mexico have balanced the outcome of on the one hand the increased material resources from migration and, on the other, the negative consequences of parents' absence (op.cit.:1026). The authors suggest that the fact of parents migrating can be harmful for children's educational progress, given that few migrants are prepared for the consequences of separation.

Furthermore, migration and educational attainment compete as "alternative paths for socioeconomic mobility" (Kandel, 2003). Adolescents envisaging to migrate in the future know that Mexican educational credentials are less important than those acquired in the United States for finding a job. Therefore, they tend to skip secondary education in Mexico. In consequence, the prospect of future migration for children in left behind households can lower their incentive to invest in education, counteracting the remittances effect (Chiquiar & Hansen, 2005).

This effect has been confirmed by other studies (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2006:19), showing "a significant, but small, negative impact of being in a migrant household on school attendance of boys, and an insignificant effect on school attendance for girls".

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<sup>25</sup> The authors warn that, being a qualitative study, its outcomes are not necessarily representative of all the children in similar situation in Moldova. Only 75 children from three rural communities participated in the study; they were living for at least two years without at least one parent.

<sup>26</sup> The research was not based on a statistical sample.

This negative effect of migration on the education of 12 to 18 year-old boys and of 16 to 18 year-old girls, show that living in a migrant household lowers the chances of boys completing junior high school and of boys and girls completing high school. These results are caused by different gender roles. Boys have a higher probability of migrating instead of completing school. Girls, especially when one of their parents lives abroad, face many household duties. In both cases, migration has negative effects on the education of boys and girls.

Another factor can explain the differing gender outcomes. Kandel (2003), based on surveys conducted for the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) of the University of Pennsylvania and the Universidad de Guadalajara to 725 randomly selected households in three distinct communities in the central Mexican state of Zacatecas, found that male students often have to work to sustain their families and therefore are forced to drop out of school. This result partly from socialization and partly from labor force demands placed on boys at earlier ages. However, at the *preparatoria* level, female students tend to have higher dropout rates because of marriage, and rural females at all levels tend to drop out earlier because of household resource allocation patterns favoring future male breadwinners.

Local infrastructure also influences schooling patterns of children in migrant households. In small communities, there are fewer options for higher education. Therefore, there is more migration to the US. As a result, drop-out rates in local high schools and colleges are higher (Kandel, 2003).

## **Ecuador**

Similar results are shown in Ecuador by a 2005 survey among 450 Guayaquil students (Cartillas sobre Migración, 2006) of three secondary schools examined the feelings of the students about the absence of their parents, their relations with their parents, school performance and the use of remittances within their household. Almost 45 percent of the students had one migrating parent and 8 percent had both parents living abroad.

The study found that an important factor influencing schooling was the migrant status of the children's parents. Students with migrant parents performed worse than other children and their marks were lower. Given the absence of one or both parents, children faced increasing household responsibilities which jeopardizes their school performance. Girls have to dedicate more time to household duties than boys. Consequently their school performance was often weaker.

The 2004 Ecuador survey (Carrillo & Herrera, 2004) among children of migrants in the South of the country, found that those left with their grandparents complained from lack of support. This same survey found in small cities in expensive schools the meaning of being 'migrant's children' had negative connotations; it was associated with poverty, ethnic background or rapid social mobility. Non migrant parents of school children, teachers and other school authorities held unfounded negative opinions on migrant children, which affected left behind children's school performance. Contrariwise, in

public schools children in migrant households, having access to more money than their peers, often become leaders in their class.

## **Moldova**

The Moldova qualitative study (UNICEF Moldova, 2006) sought only limited information on children's education; however some aspects of their school performance can be obtained from the interviews with school teachers and authorities (and the children themselves). The adults argued that children from migrant households were at risk of leaving school, because they lacked motivation and their performance was rather mediocre, and declining. And they considered that the lack of parental supervision and monitoring was behind the declining performance of these children. Children could not always rely on caregivers, who were not always able to follow their performance. Among other reasons they mentioned that in some cases after the departure of their parents children had to take care of daily household duties and had little time left for their studies. This view was shared by 15-18 year-olds living without parents.

The interviews revealed certain concealed conflicts between teachers and children from migrant households; some teachers reported that part of the teaching staff had mixed attitudes and feelings towards children without parental care, a combination of envy and sympathy. Envy because these children received remittances, while the teachers in charge of them received meagre salaries. It was reported that some teachers took revenge on children, assuming nasty attitudes, or asking secretly for money rewards for their attention or high marks.

We can find similarities between Moldova and Ecuador concerning the reactions of teachers towards children in migrant households. Teachers judged children not only according to their academic performance, but also about their attitudes which they describe generally as 'arrogant, aggressive and rude'.

## **Philippines**

The 2003 Children and Families Survey conducted in the Philippines (Scalabrini Migration Institute), found that migrant children, who are often enrolled in private schools, tend to perform better and receive higher grades compared to children of non-migrants.

Yang (2006) examines Philippine households' responses to overseas members' economic shocks, finding positive income shocks leading human capital accumulation and entrepreneurship in migrants' origin households. Also, the author confirms that children in migrant households have benefit from improved access to education and health services thanks to remittances. According to these view, migration leads to increased school enrolment and attendance. In the same direction, a study by Battistela & Conaco (1998) concluded that relatives may fulfil the role of parents relatively successfully. They explore in particular the impact of migration on the children left behind, through a research conducted among elementary school children of Filipino

migrants. Overall, the impression is that migration is not necessarily disruptive for the development of the children left behind, particularly if it is the mother who remains in the home. The effect depends mostly on the extent of involvement of the extended family in complementing the gaps resulting from parental absence.

On the other hand, a UNICEF-PNUD Philippines report (Coronel & Unterreiner, 2005) argued that parents' absence jeopardizes the positive impacts of remittances on school enrolment and attendance among Filipino children. Parrenas (2006) found that children in migrant households had higher levels of enrolment and lower dropout rates, while girls with migrant parents were able to improve their school performance.

## **Pakistan**

A survey in rural Pakistan on the impacts of temporary migration on children's education (Mansuri 2006) examined how variations in household structure among migrants influenced schooling choices.<sup>27</sup> A quarter of households had at least one migrant, most of which were abroad at the time of the survey. The study compared education outcomes – school attendance and permanence – between children in households with and without migrants. It found that children in migrant households had higher levels of enrolment and lower dropout rates (op.cit.: 8).

The research concluded that migration affected school enrolment positively; children in migrant households attended school more frequently, their dropout rates were lower, and progressed in school better than children in non migrant households in the same village. However, when looking at the impact of migration and remittances in female headed households, the results are different. The dropout rates of girls in migrant households are lower than among girls in the control group. Contrariwise, boys fared better in non migrant households. Mansuri (op.cit.) argues that this difference relates to the increased work burden falling to boys when their father is away, although the issue needs more research (Mansuri, 2006:18). In Pakistan the prevailing patterns of women and girls' seclusion can help explaining why boys are in charge of most of the work outside the household.

Besides, in migrant households children of both genders work less than in non migrant ones; however, in female headed households (which in most cases are migrant households) children support a higher work burden, neutralizing the positive effects of migration on children's outcomes.

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<sup>27</sup> The study uses data from the Pakistan Rural Household Survey (PRHS) 2001-02, which collected detailed information on migration for each household member. The available data covered 2531 rural households in 143 villages in 16 districts across all provinces. The survey contains detailed household and individual characteristics, including migration experience of all household members.

## 2.2.2. The impact of migration on children's health

### Mexico

The relationship between migration and children's health is complex. Kanaiaupuni & Donato (1999) applied multilevel methods to data from Mexico to examine how village migration patterns affect infant survival outcomes in origin. They argue that migration is a cumulative process with varying health effects at different stages of its progression. The authors have identified rises in infant mortality in the immediate period after migration took place. Their study shows that remittance-recipient households and children have improved their living standards, although it also points to the negative effects of family disruption on children's general health during the first period of their parent's migration. In a second stage, remittances are able to improve children's access to healthcare facilities, compensating the initial negative impacts (see, Kanaiaupuni & Donato, 1999; Cortes, 2007).

McKenzie (2006), who analyzes health outcomes of children in migrant households, draws different conclusions. His study was based on data from the 1997 National Survey of Demographic Dynamics, a nationally representative demographic survey of more than 70,000 households. Applying Ordinary Least Squares and probabilistic methods, he finds lower rates of infant mortality and higher birth weights than in non-migrant households.

These results derive from improved knowledge about health care and from higher income from migration. However, McKenzie (2006) found that children in migrant households are less likely to receive preventive health care.<sup>28</sup> The study, however, suggests that there may be long-term negative impacts on health outcomes due to parental absence. Furthermore, there is a need to investigate the causes of lower preventive healthcare in migrant households.

Some studies also mention the risks of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis or AIDS, transmitted by returning or visiting migrants while admitting that there is a lack of systematic analysis on this issue. Also, these types of diseases have the highest prevalence in rural communities (see, HDR, 2007).

### Pakistan

The case of Pakistan shows how gender patterns determine the effects of migration on children's access to health and education. In Pakistani rural households, there is a significant preference for sons. A recent survey in rural households with migrants (Mansuri, 2006) suggests that migration has a positive impact on the weight and height of girls. Thanks to remittances, Pakistani girls benefit from better access to health care.

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<sup>28</sup> Children in migrant households are found to be 30 percent more likely to be delivered by a doctor, but 19 percent less likely to be breastfed and 11 percent less likely to have received all of their recommended vaccinations for tuberculosis, diphtheria, polio, and measles (see, McKenzie, 2006)

Mansuri (2007) also examines the impact of migration on two measures of children's health in Pakistan, namely, weight for age and height for age. The author finds a positive effect on both measures of child growth. Young girls in migrant households are taller than girls of the same age in non-migrant households. Boys are taller than girls in non-migrant households, but given that girls benefit more than boys from migration, girls in migrant households actually do better than boys in absolute terms. By splitting the sample into two age groups, the research finds that the differential gender effect that holds for the younger girls is almost fully sustained among the older girls. Migration can have positive growth effects that last later in the girls' life than in the boys' life. Similar results are obtained for the weight-for-age measure. Girls from migrant households do better than those from non-migrant households. Boys have a better weight-for-age score than girls in nonmigrant households, but the differential impact of migration more than compensates for this loss, so that the score for girls is higher than that for boys in migrant households (see Mansuri, 2007; Özden & Schiff, 2007).

### **2.2.3. Psycho-social effects of parents' absence**

In the Mexican state of Zacatecas,<sup>29</sup> male labour migration to the United States transforms traditional family dynamics in sending communities (De Keijzer, 1998). Many children and adolescents in rural and urban areas of some Mexican states grow up without the physical presence of their fathers. Research found that the absence of fathers resulted into more household responsibilities for wives and children left behind. (Salgado de Snyder, 1992; Aguilera *et al.*, 1996; Marroni, 2000). Fathers who migrate often lose their sense of obligation towards their children (D'Aubeterre, 2000). In such cases, the absence of fathers often jeopardizes children's psychological health.

Moctezuma (1999) conducted qualitative research in Mexico on the role of migration on adolescents' upbringing. He finds that adolescents left behind often become labour migrants themselves. The interviews suggested that migration poses constraints to teenagers; as migration appears as a way out of poverty, teenagers are prone to dropping out of school.

The UNICEF Mexico field office launched a survey with the purpose of evaluating the social effects of migration on children and women left behind in the states of Zacatecas, Michoacan and Jalisco. This project included interviews with women in migrant households, as well as with teachers, priests and local government officials in these communities.<sup>30</sup> All three states have a long tradition of migration: in 2003, 39% of the population born in Zacatecas, 25% of those born in Michoacan and 20% of those born in Jalisco lived in the United States.<sup>31</sup>

Table 4 shows the high proportion of children living apart from one or both parents, mainly in Zacatecas.

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<sup>29</sup> Research conducted by the UNAM and the Division of Epidemiological and Psychosocial Research in Zacatecas among migrant families (Aguilera-Guzman *et al.*, 2004),

<sup>30</sup> The survey was conducted on an intentional sample of migrant households in the three states.

<sup>31</sup> See the Appendix for a detailed description of the Methodology and other information of the survey.

**Table 4. Proportion of children living with father or both parents away in three states**

Community	Jalisco	Michoacán	Zacatecas
Girls and boys living without their father (%)	34.2	21.4	52.2
Girls and boys with both parents away (%)	34.6	30	73.3

Source: UNICEF-UNDP field office survey, Mexico.

Many cases of teen pregnancy and some cases of alcohol, drug addiction and robbery are reported. There were even some extreme cases such as drug related deaths and imprisonment (see, table 5).

Mothers argued that the absence of fathers created communication problems to their children. On average, 61% of children experienced difficulties communicating with their father.

**Table 5. Reported problems among youth in left behind households in the three states**

Addiction	Michoacán	Zacatecas	Jalisco
Alcohol	9.4	15.3	21.3
Drugs	1.2	5.9	10.7
Robbery	0.0	1.7	2.7

Source: UNICEF-UNDP field office survey, Mexico.

Mothers reported that they had no assistance when solving their children's problems. This is shown in table 6.

**Table 6. Mothers facing Children's problems**

How do mothers solve children's problems	Michoacán	Zacatecas	Jalisco
Mothers do not solve the problems	2.3	10.2	12.0
Talking with children	45.8	67.8	58.7
Her family helps	4.7	1.7	25.3
Fathers' family helps	N.R.	N.R.	1.3
Friends, priest, teachers	47.1	20.3	2.7

Source: UNICEF-UNDP field office survey, Mexico.

The UNICEF study showed that in the three communities, the majority of fathers are irregular migrants who had little contact with their households. It is noticeable that mothers have to deal with their children on their own and receive very little support from other relatives. The local institutions do not provide any assistance for women left behind. There are hardly any social programmes sponsored by the national government addressing the problems of households with migrants.

## **Ecuador**

A 2005 study by FLACSO in the southern provinces of Ecuador found that boys and girls in migrant households often share these negative views on their mothers and fathers, and even on themselves. There is an emerging narrative on ‘children of migrant parents’ as victims. At the same time these children are thought to be particularly susceptible to alcoholism, drugs, teen pregnancy and other problems. Herrera (2004) argues that the mass media associates migrants with illegal practices and family disruption. The research found that the children of migrants are often discriminated mainly in middle and upper class urban schools. In contrast, in public urban schools and in rural schools this stigmatization is, however, less visible (see, Herrera 2004).

Children living alone with their mother do not report as many problems as those living with their father, with their grandparents or with other relatives. Herrera (2004) identified cases of children left in charge of older brothers or sisters who had to assume adult roles without the required preparation. The changing roles within the household affected the distribution of responsibilities. The new tutors have to respect the decisions of absent parents, while dealing with the everyday problems. These changing roles often create conflicts between children and caretakers.

Pribilsky (2001) carried out interviews with 15 different families and a household survey of 45 randomly chosen domestic units in four villages of Ecuador’s lower Cañar province. The results emphasize the influence of society’s prejudices concerning children in migrant households in sending areas. Mothers frequently remark that their children suffered from nervous breakdowns after their fathers’ departure. The author argues that children’s nervous<sup>32</sup> symptoms such as fear, illnesses, etc., are created by the demands of their mothers after their fathers left the country.

Irregular migrants tend to come back to Ecuador only for short periods of time. Nevertheless, progress in telecommunication (cell phones, internet) increased the frequency of contact between left-behind children and their parents. But researchers remark that the quality of these interchanges is often not very high. Sometimes parents limited themselves to giving instructions concerning the uses of remittances (Carrillo, 2006).

## **Philippines**

In 2003, the Scalabrini Migration Centre launched a country-wide research<sup>33</sup> whose main objective was to examine the views of 10-12 year-old Filipino children on the fact that their parents were migrants, as well as the consequences of their parents’ absence. The study sought to reveal information on health status, academic performance and the

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<sup>32</sup> According to Pribilsky (2001) *nervios* in the sending communities of the Ecuadorian Andes represents a way in which children make sense of their changing world and bring a voice to transformations that they, for the most part, do not completely understand.

<sup>33</sup> In association with the Pastoral Commission and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, see SMC (2004).

emotional well-being of children left behind. Children from migrant and non migrant households were interviewed using a probabilistic sample.

The Scalabrini Migration Centre came to the following conclusions: the children of migrants often live in bigger households, especially when both parents are living abroad. Almost 90 percent of fathers and mothers migrated when their children were under 9 years of age. Half of the mothers had not visited the Philippines in at least two years. When mothers migrated other family member rather than their husbands took care of their children. Communication between migrant parents and their children, mainly through cell phones and messaging, was frequent, although 10 percent of children did not communicate with their parents at all (see table 5).

**Table7. Communication with parents, households with and without migrants. Philippines**

	Children of non Migrant Households	Children in Migrant Households
<b>Talk with parents</b>		
Often	25.2	24.7
Sometimes	58.2	61.9
Daily	16.7	13.4
<b>Migrant Mothers: common means</b>		
Telephone	-	71.1
Text messaging	-	15.1
Letters	-	5.3
<b>Migrant Fathers</b>		
Telephone	-	74.2
Text messaging	-	11.6
Letters	-	4.9

Source: Scalabrini Migration Center (2003:40).

Some studies (Parreñas, 2002) found that mother-child separation could be eased by constant communication and by the support of the extended family. These findings are consistent with those of the Scalabrini Migration Center, which reports a strikingly high incidence of physical abuse suffered by children. The boys left behind by migrants parents are particularly vulnerable to this situation. The study reflects that more left behind boys than non-migrant children claimed that they had experienced this problem (10.4% vs. 9.5%), and this was highest among the sons of land-based migrant fathers (12.4%) and where both parents were abroad (12.7%) (SMC, 2004:48).

Asis (2006) also found that regular communication between migrant parents and their children lowers the levels of anxieties and loneliness, although children with both parents away reported unhappiness (Yeoh, 2007). Parreñas (2005) addresses transnational relations between Filipino migrant mothers and their young adult children and concludes that family members are able to maintain close ties despite the distance. However, not all

families may have access to communication, particularly, migrant families do not have uniform access to the resources needed to maintain intimate transnational relations.

## **Moldova**

In Moldova, children left behind by their parents who are taken care of by other relatives face responsibilities other children of their age are usually not confronted with. The roles taken over by children with at least one parent abroad are different from those of children from non migrant households. Aside from household duties, children have to take care of younger sisters and brothers when their parents go working abroad.

Surveys also showed that, thanks to remittances, children left behind have more pocket money than their peers which they spend in bars and for buying expensive goods, such as fancy clothes, electronic devices, and computers. However, there were also reports on children who face the risk of being placed in residential care institutions and thus being deprived of any form of family care. Such children are put at risk of living on the streets or get trafficked. Children under five left behind by a migrant mother or both parents face the highest risk of missing out on their early childhood development. Thereby, children of migrants left behind may be worse on several counts not only compared to other children of migrants but also compared to other children in the same age group.

Almost all of the children reported that after the departure of their parents they faced psychological problems. It seems as if money cannot compensate for the suffering caused by the separation from their parents. (UNICEF Moldova, 2006).

## **Jamaica**

The literature on Jamaican migration concentrates on its psychological consequences of those left behind. It also examines the cultural acceptance of migration within Jamaica's society. There is a lack of private or public institutions for dealing with the problems faced children left behind.

In the 1960s, significant numbers of West Indian mothers emigrated to the United States to seek work as nurses and nannies, leaving their children behind. This practice was adopted by mothers from other countries as well (Nazario, 2002). The period of children-parents' separation in Jamaica has been calculated as an average between 6 and 10 years (Pottinger, 2005). This is the case of parental migration, defined as when parents migrate for a defined time or indefinitely but have no intention of having their children live abroad. For these children, the only hope of ever seeing their parents again will be through occasional visits to them or upon their return.

The existence of a strong familial kinship network among the working class in Jamaica and other Caribbean countries makes it easy for a mother to migrate and leave her children behind with relatives, friends, or neighbours. This practice is not considered abnormal in the communities where these children are fostered, there is "no stigma attached" to children left behind (Waters, 1999). When, however, mothers cannot find a

job, or for any reason interrupt the flow of remittances children become vulnerable to harmful consequences.

A survey in Jamaica<sup>34</sup> looked at the effects of migration on parents and children between 9 and 10 years old, living in inner city communities, in Kingston and St Andrews, showing that children's reactions to their parents' migration were directly related to poor school performance and psychological difficulties "Protective" factors included having someone to talk to about the migration and living in a supportive family. (Pottinger, 2005).

The *Harvard Immigration Project* (Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2002) interviewed 385 children residing in the United States from migrant parents of various nationalities, finding that 85% of them endured lengthy separation from their parents during the migration process. The research found that children of migrant parents are under-protected or inadequately supervised, resulting in them being exposed to harmful consequences: Assuming adult-like responsibilities prematurely such as managing large amounts of money that their parents send or looking after younger siblings becomes a way of life for some. School work has also been found to be affected, possibly as a result of the emotional turmoil accompanying the separation or for some, they adopt a 'waiting to migrate' mentality and therefore lose focus on their school work.

### **3. Social Dimensions of Migration: Women and in left behind households**

Men, women, boys and girls are allocated in different positions affecting their entitlements and command over resources. Gender differences are socially constructed characteristics which influence men and women's access to resources. In this respect, in many cultures domestic provisioning is women and girls' main responsibility. Scholars have challenged the gender neutral approach in migration research, stressing the gendered nature of migration processes and impacts, contending that people's experiences of gender are central to the patterns, causes and impacts of migration. Adopting a gender perspective in the analysis of migration also contributes to understanding the impacts of migration on girls and boys; in every culture the expectations of family and community regarding children's performance in school, household tasks and work are strongly influenced by the social definition of gender.

The question is if migration has the potential to reconfigure gender relations and power inequalities in left behind households. Does it have positive impacts for gender equality, empowering women in left-behind households? How do gender relations influence the impacts of migration on children in sending countries?

These issues are heavily influenced by the structure of the household in question. Families consist of sets of hierarchical relationships organized along gender and age

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<sup>34</sup> Pottinger (2005) investigated impacts of migration on children in a case-control sample of 9- to 10-year-olds living in inner-city communities in Kingston and St Andrew, Jamaica. Data analyses using descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations were used.

lines, which play a central role in securing individuals' livelihoods. The distribution of decision-making responsibilities among its members, concerning the allocation of resources, and the socialization of the younger generations, generates tensions among its members. Besides, families relate to and reflect the broader society in which they are embedded. The discussion on migration's gender implications has to acknowledge that there is not on fixed and universal model of family; family configurations vary by region, social class, culture, religious beliefs, among other factors. And that these differences influence migration's impacts on the members of left-behind households.

Research on migration and its impacts on gender have been traditionally confined to ethnographic, qualitative studies, which has contributed to the marginalization of gender focus (Pessar and Mahler, 2004). The majority of research studies and agencies' concerns have dealt with the process of feminization of migration and the risks faced in host countries and less with women left behind by their spouses' migration (Jolly *et al.*, 2003). Several organizations within the United Nations system have concentrated on the same issues. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2006), in a joint effort with the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2006) has highlighted the importance of gender issues in the policy discussion on international migration. These two organizations focused on women 'in the move', either migrants, refugees or trafficked. Their documents examined causes and consequences of women's migration, identifying their vulnerabilities and problems faced in four situations: during departure, in transit, in the host country and upon return. Besides, they proposed lines for action towards the protection and empowerment of migrant women.<sup>35</sup>

In Bangladesh and Pakistan (mainly qualitative) the studies found different results; some women gained greater roles in decision-making, except in cases when men from the husbands' family remain in control of the financial management of the household. In the same line Siddiqui (2001) showed that when men migrate, women assume their roles in the household. In the latter countries men's migration to the Middle East contributed to adopting strict Islamic customs resulting in increased seclusion and loss of autonomy of women (Jolly *et al.*, 2003). In Punjab that long-term male absences have sometimes allowed wives greater decision-making power regarding land, children's education and household finances, which does not revert to their husbands upon their return. (Jolly *et al.* 2003, Whitehead & Hashim, 2005).

Parrenas (2005:4) argues that in the Philippines, the absence of migrating men does not transform traditional gender structures but on the contrary entrenches traditional relations. This author finds that in the families of migrant men, a slight shift in the gender division of labour occurs as women left behind in the Philippines must adjust to the absence of men and expand definitions of mothering to include those typically relegated to men such as the disciplining of children. In contrast, migration's complete removal of the mother from the home prompts more drastic gender transformations. It encourages the reconstitution of mothering to not just include breadwinning but to also mean a lesser responsibility for homemaking.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The ILO (2004) in turn focuses on the rights of women migrants. This topic is discussed in the section on policy recommendations.

<sup>36</sup> Parrenas (2005) based these observations on the review of the literature and on a reduced number of in-

Frank & Wildsmith (2005) provide an empirical test of the widely accepted assumption that migration contributes to union instability. Using data from the Mexican Migration Project they estimated multilevel discrete time event history analysis to specify the odds of union dissolution for male household heads by individual- and community-level U.S. migration experience. In the context of the U.S.-Mexico migration flow, they find that U.S. migration significantly increases the odds of union dissolution for individuals with extensive migration experience as well as for residents in communities with medium international migration levels. In this sense, changes in normative values and social control levels, for both individuals and communities, are partial contributors to this relationship. Moreover, they suggest that the Mexican migration process creates a new generation of “grass widows” – women, who like their ancestors over 100 years ago, remain tied to unions that in reality no longer exist. According to these authors, migration often leads to *de facto* marriage dissolutions.

Mexico is a (patriarchal) society in which formal authority is invested in a male household head who exercises power over wives and daughters, while in the Caribbean societies mother and their children are the basic family unit, as adult males ‘come and go’ (Barrow, 1996). In a recent survey Massey *et al.* (2006) incorporate sociological variables (such as sex, relation to head, household membership, year of birth, place of birth, marital status, education, and occupation) into the analysis of the determinants of migration. The authors examine the effects of cultural gender patterns in Latin American countries. Based on census data, this research ranked five Latin American countries (Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Nicaragua and Puerto Rico) on a gender continuum ranging from patriarchal to matrifocal. The study focused on the odds of migration among women and men. It finds that in patriarchal settings, the fact of being married lowers the chances for women to migrate, while they are more mobile in matrifocal societies.

In the West African Savannah there are few cases of female headed households, because wives of migrant men were incorporated into households headed by their husbands’ senior male family members or are taken into polygamous marriages. Where wives and children taken care of by other senior males and do not lose their social place in the community, then some of the potential detrimental effects may not emerge.

In Kerala, million married women live away from their spouses. Researchers found that many of these women acquire independence and autonomy thanks to the absence of their husbands (Zachariah *et al.* 1999). Although in the beginning, difficulties are encountered, they later on learn to be independent and autonomous; they gain status, management skills and experience in dealing with the world outside their homes. The society may also benefit in the long run from this new group of active citizens, and possibly even more so than short term from remittances (Katseli *et al.* 2006).

Summarizing, the review shows that the empirical research on migration’s impacts on gender relationships, roles and dynamics is still in its infancy; the evidence is sometimes contradictory and country specific. One of the social issues at stake is the separation of migrants from family. Interviews with women in migrant households indicate that in different contexts family separation is viewed as one of the costs of

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depth interviews conducted in 2000 in the Philippines on migrant households.

migration. These costs partly depend on the length of time a spouse spends abroad, and on the number of visits, which impacts upon the relationships; generally irregular migrants suffer extended separations.

Concerning changes in traditional gender roles and women's empowerment, the evidence is still limited for arriving to general conclusions; case studies in countries where women have limited access to work outside their homes show that migration by itself does not change prevailing power relations. But there are also examples of increased independence of these women. Migration can set off the process of women's empowerment, but this outcome is influenced by the characteristics of the community of origin, of the women themselves, and of the migration process itself (Hugo, 1994).

The left-behind men do not always replace women in domestic tasks; there is some evidence indicating that husbands of migrant women rather than increasing their domestic workload recur to the extended family for support.<sup>37</sup>

## 4. Policy Initiatives

The development of migration theories does not match that of policies towards migration, which stem from nation-states. At the global policy level it has been very difficult to create effective instruments for global governance on migration, with the exception of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention by 146 states. However, economic migrants do not have similar legal arrangements; the 1949 and 1975 ILO Conventions and the 1990 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their families have been ratified by few receiving countries. Castles (2004) argues that the protection of economic migrants' rights requires the development of an instrument of international law providing a clear definition of the groups covered and rules for international governance. In addition, he warns against specific policies for migrants in their home countries, which could increase inequalities. He would support designing migration policies linked to measures for reducing inequality addressing societies as a whole.

The main thrust of previous global initiatives has been centred on the management of migration; more recent ones follow a rights-based perspective; in 2003 the United Nations established the Global Commission on International Migration.<sup>38</sup> In 2006 the United Nations organized the High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development which was the first event dealing with these issues.

The resolutions of these global bodies stress the importance of protecting migrants' rights in the process of economic and social development for reducing out-migration (GCIM 2005). The 2005 GCIM report pushes forward the notion that the collaboration between the main actors can yield gains to sending and receiving countries.

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<sup>37</sup> In Philippines (Parrenas, 2006, Scalabrini Migration Center, 2003) Ecuador (FOMIN-BID, 2003) and Sri Lanka described in section 2.

<sup>38</sup> The Global Commission on International Migration was officially launched by the UN Secretary-General and a number of governments on December 2003, and finished its work in 2005.

Until now, these initiatives address mainly the rights of mobile workers, and less the risks that family left behind might need to face due to members' out-migration. The closing statement of the High Level Dialogue makes explicit reference to the vulnerability of women and children in the migration process.<sup>39</sup>

Both in the debate and in the design of policies concerning migration there is a dearth of the social dimensions of migration, analyzing the relationships between social policy, social protection and migration in the sending regions. Policy and programme interventions need to recognize the specificity of left behind children's problems. Isolated programmes without accompanying changes in local and regional policies and without significant state expenditures on infrastructure, sanitation, health and education are unlikely to lead to major improvements in the situation of children.

UNFPA's recent work has concentrated on women migrants, and developed a global research identifying human rights problems faced by women on the move. This organization is aware of the problems faced by children left behind by migrant parents (mainly mothers): It warns against long-term migration and its social costs borne by the left behind. It also remarks that it is necessary to take into consideration the education of children left behind, including girl children, and to arrangements for care of the elderly (UNFPA, 2006a:18-25). Besides, UNFPA is concerned with the lack of data necessary to fully grasp the gendered nature and consequences of migration. Therefore, it recommends research on the social impacts of migration in countries of origin, in particular the impact on children, on women left behind and the elderly; research and documentation on the impact of female migration on both sending and receiving countries (UNFPA, 2006b:20). UNFPA's recommendations are similar to those of the UN World Survey (2004) which proposes the elaboration of laws that are designed to prevent discrimination of migrant women and to guarantee their access to legal protection and social services in destination countries.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) is currently working on labor migration and the needs to contribute to a legal protection framework for men and women migrants. More specific recommendations deal with the protection of rights of migrants in destination countries, while at the same time ILO is contributing to the design of programmes for temporary and return migration (ILO, 2007). This organization considers that temporary migration programs can promote opportunities and create beneficial situations for host and receiving countries, while fostering the reduction of irregular migration. However, the ILO is currently making efforts in raising issues of protection of rights of temporary workers.

More recently there is a resurgence of proposals for temporary migration, as a solution to the increased migration pressure. Most global bodies (GCIM, 2005, the European Commission (CEC, 2005), and the World Bank (2006) argue that low skilled temporary migration is a sound strategy. They propose implementing temporary employment permits allowing for seasonal migration, and fostering assistance for returnees. The amount of permits would depend on the demand for workers.

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<sup>39</sup> Chairperson's Summary of the Conclusions of the HLD (2006).

However several migration experts (de Haan (2006); Castles, 2006), observed that the proposal of temporary migration does not take into account previous failures of similar policies, as migrants tend to remain in the host country. Other measures proposed by the World Bank (2006), basically informing migrants on the risks involved in the various stages of the migration process, will not necessarily deter migration. De Haan (2006) argues that instead of managing migration, global policies should invest in development in sending regions, because development is important in its own right, and because it improves people's wellbeing and freedom, regardless of its impact on migration.

While most organizations are inclined to work in favour of the protection of migrant rights in the country of destination, UNICEF has an opportunity to advocate for the rights of children and women in left-behind households.

## 5. Conclusions

The policy and academic literature on migration's impacts in sending countries has focused on the issue of development, and on the contributions of remittance flows, skills and culture. The concern with children and women in left behind households has been limited, and in addition, research did not arrive to conclusive results. Research has been conducted in heterogeneous settings; until now there are no panel studies giving account of how children and women's wellbeing changed after migration; social dimensions more often than not use an ethnographic approach, and generalizations are difficult to achieve.<sup>40</sup>

The review shows that comparing the effects of migration on child and women's well-being across different sending countries there are some notable differences but also some commonalities.

- When fathers migrate mothers undertake the main responsibilities within the remaining household.
- The increase of autonomy and empowerment of women does not occur across countries; it depends on the social and cultural context.
- Female headed migrant households do not emerge in every region; in some societies left behind spouses are integrated into the household of their husbands' next of kin
- Family separation can lead to spouses' separations
- When mothers migrate, their spouses often rely on other family members; children seem to suffer the consequences of their mother absence more than that of their father
- When both parents migrate caregivers are not always adequate for parental guidance, and there are case reports of several negative impacts on school performance and on psychological wellbeing

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<sup>40</sup> These conclusions are based on the review of the studies in the preceding sections.

- Migrant parents have developed strategies for continuing interaction with their remaining spouses and children, although transnational relationships are not always sufficient for children's development, as children lack parents' guidance
- In certain contexts money from remittances has diminished child labor, and contributed to improving their access to educational and health-care services.
- The gender division of roles between boys and girls pre-exists migration; migration's impacts has reinforced previous gender patterns, not changed them.
- Studies indicate that before migration in poor households boys performed work for income, and girls helped in the domestic tasks. After migration girls still worked in the household, which hampered their permanence in school.
- In most sending communities the degree of development of public and social infrastructure is poor; this imposes limits to the impacts of remittances on improving boys and girls' access to education and health care
- In the community level the reports indicate that children in remittance receiving households improve visibly their consumption vis a vis other school children and teachers.
- In some cases this has fostered certain forms of rejection from teachers and other families in the community
- Although there is growing concern with the situation of children in left-behind households, there are no systematic government interventions to buffer the consequences of migration
- Government programs directed to left-behind children and women in sending countries are scarce.<sup>41</sup> They lack clear objectives, financing, and trained personnel. Programs targeted only to migrant children can increase inequalities.

The main conclusion is that migration by itself cannot guarantee the realization of children's rights to protection, quality education, parents' guidance, and full participation in society. Nor it can modify ingrained gender relationships which allocate domestic work to girls and mothers and might limit their right to access paid work and higher education. Migration provides means to overcome financial constraints, and puts in contact different cultures and knowledge, enriching in many ways the sending regions. But it is important to bear in mind that development and the equalization of rights have to be pushed for by political cooperative interventions of governments, international organizations and migrants.

## 6. Policy Recommendations

This presentation emphasized the role of all the factors influencing the migration process – the absence of parents, remaining household arrangements, cultural patterns, community reactions – on children's well being and on the equalization of women's rights. In this perspective, the challenges for UNICEF and partners in the migration debate and policy design are complex. Children's rights are being threatened after their

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<sup>41</sup> Excepting of the Philippines, El Salvador and Ecuador.

parents' migration, within the new households, in school, and in the community. UNICEF and partners, jointly with local governments can launch systems of continuous monitoring of children and women's wellbeing. Such monitoring will allow obtaining information regularly on children's situation in households, school and the community.

UNICEF has two main fields of action concerning the protection of children and women in migrant households in sending countries. One is advocacy; while the other is the intervention in programs in sending countries.

Concerning advocacy, UNICEF can contribute to increasing the visibility of children and women in migrant households, through advocacy in international forums and with governments in sending countries.

Regarding policy interventions, the main challenge is that there is a danger of creating or reinforcing inequalities within sending communities, and of encouraging a prejudiced view of members of migrant households as 'different', or privileged because they not only receive remittances money but they also receive the attention of international organizations and governments. There are various main levels of interventions in the areas of high out-migration; the idea is that these interventions should be in alliance with development cooperation and government institutions.

- Programs oriented towards improving the existing supply of social services and infrastructure
- Training programs directed to teachers, health care workers, for improving the quality of services, but also for increasing awareness on the problematic of left-behind children and women
- Programs for all children, complementing school activities, supporting the educational programs (extra school help)
- Programs directed to adults in charge of households, migrants and non migrants, on parenting, guidance
- Programs directed to enhance gender equality in educational contents
- Capacity-building and training programs for productive employment among youth and adults
- Cooperation efforts for the creation of Observatories of Children and Women's rights including those in migrant households

To conclude, UNICEF's role will consist of advocacy, social interventions, and institution building; these actions require the support from other organizations and of local and national governments.

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