

“Children and Migration”

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Themes: Child Wellbeing, Age at Migration, Fertility and Households

Regions: North America, Central America, South America, East Asia, South/Central Asia, Africa, West Europe, East Europe/Russia, Australia and Oceania

Age Ranges: <6, 6-11, 12-17

Keywords: Physical Health, Education/Cognition, Economic Status, Work and Employment, Mental Health/Socioemotional, Households

Abstract:

Globally, high rates of adult migration in various forms means that the numbers of children affected by all kinds of migration world-wide is truly staggering. This paper is a preliminary effort to foreground the issue of children in DFID's work on migration, through a review of the available literature and a discussion of the implications of their findings. The report concentrates only on children left behind and independent child migrants; a child being defined as anyone between the ages of 0 and 17 and 'independent child migrants' meaning any child who migrates separately from their parents.

The report finds that estimating the *number* of individuals and families that have migrated and/or are affected by migration is extremely difficult due to a range of methodological problems, including: the paucity and poor quality of the data sources; countries differing widely in the extent to which they document migration; figures not being collected in any standardised way and the illegal and/or undocumented nature of some movement. These problems are further compounded in the case of estimating the numbers of children affected, because: children often do not appear separately from adults in the statistics; reliable national level data about the incidence of all kinds of child migration are exceedingly rare; where these are available categories are used in different ways by different surveys and writers, and there is a lack of consensus regarding terms and their operationalisation. Additionally, the focus on particular types of child migrants – such as trafficked children – invisibilises child migrants who do not fall into these categories such that there are few estimates as to how many other children are moving and for what reasons. However, there does appear to be a general agreement in the literature that there is a substantial increase in the numbers of children leaving their home communities independently of their families.

The difficulties in estimating the numbers of child migrations makes it difficult also to assess the *impact* of migration on children's health, mortality and education. In terms of children left behind, few studies tackle directly the implications that migration as a livelihood strategy may have for the well-being of children. Instead we have to infer the effects on children from studies of the effect on the household as a whole. However, we find that it is difficult to generalise about whether the impact on children left behind with parental labour migration is positive or negative. Whether the outcomes are positive or negative in strictly resource terms depends on a large number of factors, of which a key one is the extent to which the work that migrants are doing is well rewarded in local terms. Where fathers are migrants, and wives and children are cared for by other senior males so that they do not lose their social place in the community, then some of the potential detrimental effects may not emerge. Support from relatives may, however, come at a price. Where the rates of male absenteeism are very high and prolonged, fragmented family structures may result in profound effects on well being and on children because children have no father to bestow recognition on them. On the other hand, remittances by absent fathers can, in some instances, ensure food security, help repay debts and cover the costs of schooling and illness of relatives left behind. What little research has been done on the effects on

children of mothers' migrating suggests that this might have more adverse effects, particularly psychosocial ones, although there is growing discussion of scattered evidence that remittance behaviour differs between men and women migrants, with women being more concerned about children's well being.