



# Migration, Human Rights and Sustainable Human Development<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The number of international migrants has more than doubled since 1975.<sup>2</sup> As a result, international migration is the subject of unprecedented attention at the policy level, with special attention being paid to its impact in receiving and sending societies.

The vibrant discourse on migration and development recognises that migration can help migrants and their families improve their living standards and welfare. At the same time migration can also introduce new vulnerabilities and costs for migrants, their families, and sending communities. In policy circles there is increasing consensus that for migration to become an effective tool for development in labour sending countries it is necessary to design the right complementary policies and programmes, including those relating to social protection. In a recent statement, the UN Secretary General described international migration as a “positive force for development if buttressed by the right policies.”

This short paper sets out the main concerns of UNDP and UNICEF in respect of their work on migration and development – including a focus on sustainable human development, the rights of migrants and their families with special attention to women and children, remittances, and brain drain.

Both UNICEF and UNDP are committed to working with governments to achieve higher levels of human development and to realizing the rights of their populations, while at the same time protecting the rights of migrants and their families affected by the migration process. To achieve this both agencies believe it is essential to take into account the perspectives of migrants, migrant organizations, and migrant communities themselves, in order to inform public policy that meets their needs.

UNICEF's mission is to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet children's basic needs and to expand their opportunities in reaching their full potential. UNICEF is guided in its work by the provisions and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

UNDP's concept of human development is about much more than the rise or fall of national incomes. It is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accordance with their needs and interests. Development is about expanding the choices people – especially those that are poor and vulnerable – have to lead lives that they value. And it is thus about much more than economic growth, which is only a means – if an important one – of enlarging people's choices.

UNICEF and UNDP's work on migration includes policy research and projects at the country level to help governments place migration within their national development strategies, facilitate remittance flows and enhance their overall contribution to development, and support capacity development. UNICEF is collaborating with UNDP and other partners, including IOM, on supporting greater visibility of the social dimensions of migration in national development initiatives (Ecuador, Mexico, Moldova, Albania, El Salvador, Ghana and Nicaragua). In addition, UNICEF and UNDP work jointly on:

- Identifying the vulnerabilities and risks faced by girls, boys and women who live in households and communities experiencing outward migration
- Increasing the awareness of the main players in the migration debate of these risks
- Participating – with governments, UN organizations and civil society – in the design of migration policies that protect women and children
- Proposing the inclusion of gender and child-sensitive migration issues in the social policy frameworks of sending and receiving countries

In order to achieve these objectives, more research and comparable global data is needed on the impacts of migration on sustainable human development. In particular, more research is required on how children are affected by migration, including those left behind, those migrating with their parents, and those migrating alone and risking trafficking. Greater understanding is needed of the magnitude, location, age, ethnicity, origin and household situation of children affected by migration.

## **1. Migration and Sustainable Human Development<sup>3</sup>**

Migration has the potential to deliver many positive benefits for development and poverty reduction, and contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In an increasingly globalised and integrated world, the move abroad is economically beneficial for most migrant workers and their families. Remittances to labour-exporting countries represent a key source of foreign exchange<sup>4</sup> and in addition can provide valuable lifelines to recipient families and communities. Migrant communities overseas

can be important sources of expertise and support, and returning migrants can bring new knowledge and skills. Labour sending communities are also recipients of “social remittances” - norms for behaviour, ideas about gender, race, and class identity, good governance and access to basic social services that are transferred with or by migrants.<sup>5</sup>

Migration poses a number of challenges to migrants and their families. These can include risks to the healthy mental and physical development of children, or increases in the workload of women and children left behind in countries of origin. Migrant children and adolescents in host countries can also face constraints in accessing social services, risking long term social exclusion. Migration can also produce unwanted consequences on sending communities, depleting the number of skilled professionals in key sectors such as health or education.

UNICEF and UNDP are concerned with enhancing the potential that migration has for supporting sustainable human development and the realization of human rights. While migration research has identified positive educational outcomes for children living in migrant households, there may be structural limits to these positive effects, such as the insufficient supply of quality schools at local and national level, or the existence of gender gaps which act as constraints to the advancement of girls. There may also be a disincentive to continue education if migration is seen as more ‘profitable’.

In countries with a long standing tradition of international migration – Ecuador, Moldova, Mexico, the Philippines among others – governments and other stakeholders are making efforts to deal with some of migration’s risks and positive impacts. UNDP and UNICEF believe that it is crucially important to address child, gender, human rights and human development issues concerning both migrants and family members who do not migrate with them.

Several UN agencies and IOM are working on specific operational migration research in many countries. IOM for example has launched programmes centred on returning migrants, financing their re-integration into their home country. The ILO has developed a research program on labour migration emphasizing the need to protect migrants’ labour rights in host countries. UNFPA has studied the gender aspects of migration, such as the increasing feminization of migration. UNICEF and UNDP are working in collaboration with UN agencies, IOM, and other stakeholders to provide a common perspective and policy framework on migration and development.

## **2. Migration and Children**

While migration is moving up the global development agenda, its wide-ranging implications for children and adolescents have received little attention so far. Migration problems affecting children and youth must be seen in the broader contexts of widespread poverty and conflict, in the global as well as the local context, and against the perspectives of vulnerability, gender relations and the rights of children and adolescents.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) protects every child, regardless of nationality or immigration status. States have obligations to adopt principles outlined in the Convention towards each and every child within their jurisdiction. These principles include, among others, the right to a nationality, to physical integrity, 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.

There is a deficiency of reliable national-level data about the incidence of international migration flows of both adults and children – including children left behind and children migrating alone. It is difficult to estimate these numbers due to a range of methodological problems such as the lack of a standardized instrument by which migration data is gathered and the fact that many migrants remain undocumented<sup>6</sup>. UNICEF and UNDESA are collaborating to gather comprehensive data to quantify and assess the volume of international migration flows and their economic and social implications.

More comprehensive research is needed to inform better policy. Migration policies should be part of national development strategies for poverty reduction – including PRSs – as well as the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). In these planning frameworks special emphasis should be placed on decentralized work with municipalities from which most migrants originate while recognising that migration itself cannot be considered an alternative to effective national poverty reduction policies. Moreover, the impacts on children and adolescents must be central in these strategies. The impact of migration on the fulfilment of human rights among affected children, households and communities should be carefully monitored through qualitative surveys, data collection and other relevant statistical research.

Children and adolescents affected by migration are particularly vulnerable and should receive special protection. Specific policies on migration should be accompanied by additional investments in health, education and social protection to address the risks, exclusion and discrimination faced by children and adolescents who are migrating or are left behind.

UNDP and UNICEF can provide support on the design of child-protective migration policies jointly with governments and UN organizations. UNDP and UNICEF can take advantage of their unique country presence in both developed and developing countries to address specific issues relating to children's rights and migration that require involvement of the source and the recipient countries of migration.

UNICEF and the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation (SU-SSC) of UNDP are engaged in evaluating the impact of international migration on sending countries and specifically on women and children left behind. A key component of this is a programme entitled “The Social Impact of Migration and Remittances on Children’s Rights and Well-Being: The Challenges and Opportunities for the MDGs – a Policy Initiative”. Key findings from this initiative (which aims at highlighting best practices and South-South exchanges) include:

- In Moldova, educational achievement of some children-left-behind is compromised by their obligations to fulfil household duties and care for younger siblings<sup>7</sup>
- There are conflicting views in labour sending countries on the impacts of remittances on the communities’ views concerning migrants’ children. Some studies hint at the stigmatizing effect of parental absence, and also of increased expenditures by youths on imported goods<sup>8</sup>
- In Mexico fathers’ absence was associated with behavioural problems: 60.6% of children left behind had problems and feel abandoned<sup>9</sup>
- Children left behind may receive little or no remittances, especially in the first year, as migrant parents struggle to find work and repay debts incurred to finance migration, and as a result they be exposed to deteriorating living conditions.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Migration and Gender

Women and girls account for nearly half of all international migrants.<sup>11</sup> Migration affects gender equality and the empowerment of women, specified as the third Millennium Development Goal. It can provide new opportunities to improve women’s lives and change oppressive gender relations, shifting gender roles and responsibilities to women’s benefit. For women migrants, money earned abroad can represent a vital source of income for themselves and their families, as well as promote greater autonomy, self-confidence and social status.

However, migration can entrench traditional roles and inequalities in countries of origin. It can also expose women to new vulnerabilities as the result of precarious legal status, exclusion and isolation in countries of destination.<sup>12</sup>

When women migrate, in many countries the fathers in charge of the remaining household tend to rely on relatives or neighbours. When fathers migrate, women face new decision making responsibilities. The obligations and rights of boys and girls in remaining households are also affected differently by male and female headed households. In Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Mexico, Ecuador and Moldova for example, research has shown that girls are often made responsible for household tasks, which then jeopardizes their school achievements. In this respect traditional views on gender roles limit the realization of girls’ rights.

UNDP and UNICEF uphold the message from the UN Secretary-General that there is a need for gender sensitive policies “to ensure that biases based on gender are not detrimental to female migrants.”<sup>13</sup>

Recent studies have emphasised the potentially negative effects of migration on women and girls.

- School performance of girls in left behind households in Mexico is compromised by their obligations to fulfill household duties and to care for younger siblings (McKenzie, 2006)
- Similarly, Srivastava (2003) found that in India male migration further reduces the chances for girls attending school.
- In Sri Lanka, according to Gamburd (2005), the children of migrant mothers tend to drop out of school to look for work or help with household chores.
- In Moldova, UNDP/UNICEF/SU-SSC research shows that about 40% of all migrants are women. Due to gender-selective migration policies and regulations for entry, a disproportionate number of female migrants are undocumented. They work mostly in the informal sector, and therefore find themselves more vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation

More research and comparable global data is needed on how migration affects women and children left behind, in order to increase the visibility of women and children in migration debates.

#### **4. Remittances<sup>14</sup>**

Remittances represent an important lifeline for a large number of people, and constitute an enormous transfer of private resources from migrants to their families and communities in labour-sending countries. Recorded remittances were estimated at \$199 billion in 2006 - an increase of \$11 billion over the 2005, while unrecorded flows may add another 50 percent. Between 30% and 45% of remittances are estimated to be South-South transfers. In most destination countries the number of women migrants has grown at a faster rate than men; currently women make up almost half of all migrants worldwide, an estimated 95 million, with corresponding implications for remittances. The combined flows make remittances larger than foreign direct investment flows and twice as large as official aid received by developing countries.

Remittances do not negate the responsibilities of developed countries to provide more and better aid, nor of developing countries to provide social services and put in place comprehensive social protection systems. It is vital that policy makers consider remittances as complementary to direct financial investment (DFI) and official development assistance (ODA). Policies should focus on sustainable human development, social cohesion, cultural plurality, and human rights in both sending and receiving countries. At the same time, the governments of the countries of origin as well

as the countries of destination have to jointly ensure that enforceable policies are in place to protect migrants.

The distributive effects of remittances vary significantly. Remittances fundamentally differ from other financial flows in that they are based on social ties and networks of responsibility and affection. Remittances are a financial manifestation of a complex network of relationships that are established between migrants, their families, and communities of origin. There is therefore a need to examine their economic, social, political, and cultural consequences, especially as they relate to women, children and other vulnerable groups.

Migrant women may have the opportunity to improve their position within their families and communities and to make independent decisions. Women who stay at home and receive remittances can gain greater control over household finances.

Recent World Bank studies suggest that remittances have a positive impact on the health and schooling of children in low-income households. Increased household revenues from remittances tend to benefit in particular the education of girls.<sup>15</sup> In Mexico, a 2006 UNICEF/SU-SSC household survey in three labour-sending states revealed that remittances contribute to improvement in infant health, reducing post-partum malnutrition by 5.4 % and infant mortality by 3%, and they increase the probability of professional care in childbirth by 30%.

Remittances may, however, sometimes have negative social effects on children left behind. The survey conducted in Mexico suggested that there is a correlation between remittances and the use of illegal substances by adolescents in areas of high emigration. More research is therefore needed to assess the social impact of remittances. In addition it must be recognized that financial flows alone cannot replace parental care and guidance. Specific social policies must address the vulnerabilities of all children including those left behind by migrating parents.

UNDP is leading additional work on remittances in the areas of:

- Regional consultations, and with the private sector, on how to facilitate the transfer of remittances, and on how to enhance their positive impact on welfare and development
- Gender and remittances – a joint project between UNDP and INSTRAW

## **5. Brain Drain**

The problems of brain drain have been most acutely characterized in relation to the health and education sectors.<sup>16</sup> While the severity of the brain drain effect varies significantly by occupation and country, it is notable that approximately 65,000 African-born physicians and 70,000 African-born professional nurses were working overseas in a developed country in the year 2000, representing about one-fifth of African-born physicians in the world, and about one-tenth of African-born professional nurses.<sup>17</sup>

Brain drain is especially high in the Caribbean where, over the past 4 decades, the region has lost more than 5 million people to migration. More than 80% of people with a tertiary level education from Jamaica, Guyana, Grenada and Haiti have emigrated, particularly to the United States.<sup>18</sup> The LDCs are also significantly affected – about one in five people with a tertiary education born in an LDC were working in OECD countries in 2000<sup>19</sup>. Almost one-third of Africa's university trained professionals and about 50,000 Africans with PhDs work outside the continent.<sup>20</sup> This “academic” brain drain of teachers and professors is therefore likely to hamper the efforts of African countries to provide their citizens with adequate education.

UN agencies, the World Bank and the IOM, as well as networks of researchers, are engaged in investigating the complex links between brain drain and its effects on the development of migrant sending countries. Whilst migration may have beneficial effects for human development, recent literature emphasizes the negative effects of brain drain on the development of countries of origin.

The UN Secretary General stresses that it is “important to provide assistance” to countries affected by brain drain, “particularly by supporting the formation of needed human capital.”

UNDP and UNICEF believe that both migrant receiving and migrant sending countries must both contribute to tackling the negative consequences of brain drain. In doing so, it is important that the following aspects be addressed:

- Health and education reforms in labour-sending countries, including the allocation of more resources to these sectors
- Links between diasporas and countries of origin in order to promote the exchange of expertise and facilitate the return of migrants to their countries of origin.
- Ethical recruiting practices in developed countries<sup>21</sup>
- The retention of health and education personnel in developing countries through adequate remuneration

Lastly, it may be possible to develop temporary worker programmes under the auspices of GATS Mode 4 that help to minimize the risks of permanent brain drain. These would allow workers to take jobs overseas for limited time periods. These agreements are more likely to produce positive benefits of migration for development if they are structured through an appropriate intergovernmental framework that pays special attention to the temporary movement of lower skilled workers, protecting the rights of migrants, and supporting skills enhancement.

*UNICEF and UNDP look forward to continuing to work with Member states, civil society, the UN family, IOM, members of the Global Migration Group and other partners on these issues.*



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- <sup>1</sup> A joint UNICEF / UNDP background paper for the 2007 Global Forum on Migration and Development
- <sup>2</sup> According to the United Nations Population Division, with most living in Europe (56 million), Asia (50 million), and North America (41 million). See DESA (2003) for further information on world migration.
- <sup>3</sup> Sections 1 and 2 draw from R.Cortes: Global Report on Migration and Children, UNICEF.
- <sup>4</sup> However, ECLAC research has found that remittances, if large in relation to other financial inflows, can also impact on the real exchange rate, reducing the country's competitiveness through Dutch Disease
- <sup>5</sup> Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, 2004. "Transnational Perspectives on Migration: Conceptualizing Simultaneity"; *International Migration Review*, Vol. 38 (145).
- <sup>6</sup> UNICEF work on measurement is conducted in collaboration with Mr. Jeronimo Cortina.
- <sup>7</sup> UNICEF/UN Special Unit for South-South Co-Operation, 2006.
- <sup>8</sup> R. Cortes, UNICEF, Remittances and Children.
- <sup>9</sup> UNICEF-UNDP survey, 2006.
- <sup>10</sup> From Innocenti Research Centre's messages for the Global Forum on Migration and Development (July 2007) . In Moldova, 25 percent of surveyed children received little or no remittances – see UNICEF(2006) Impact of Migration on Children in the CEE/CIS. Discussion Paper 5, UNICEF Regional Offices for CEE/CIS, Geneva.
- <sup>11</sup> Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, Trends in Total Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/migration/>
- <sup>12</sup> R. Cortes, UNICEF, Remittances and Children.
- <sup>13</sup> Decision No. 2007/25, Decisions of the Secretary-General from the 15 May 2007 Policy Committee Meeting.
- <sup>14</sup> Drawn in large part from the background paper for Session 2 of Roundtable 2 of the 2007 Global Forum on Migration and Development: 'Increasing the micro-impact of remittances on development', prepared by UNDP.
- <sup>15</sup> Pablo Acosta, Pablo Fajnzylber and J. Humberto Lopez: *The Impact on Remittances on Poverty and Human Capital. Evidence from Latin American Household Surveys*.  
Ghazala Mansuri: *Does Work Migration Spur Investment in Origin Communities? Entrepreneurship, Schooling, and Child Health in Rural Pakistan*, in: Caglar Ozden, Maurice Schiff (Editors): *International Migration, Economic Development & Policy*, World Bank and Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- <sup>16</sup> UNFPA: State of the World Population. A Passage to Hope, Women and International Migration, [http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2006/english/chapter\\_1/unequal\\_opportunities.html](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2006/english/chapter_1/unequal_opportunities.html)
- <sup>17</sup> Clemens, Michael and Gunilla Pettersson, 2007, "New Data on African Health Professionals Abroad." CGD Working Paper 95.
- <sup>18</sup> Gillian Barclay "Migration in the Caribbean Region", <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMIGDEV/Resources/2838212-1180638887221/GBarclay.ppt>
- <sup>19</sup> Docquier, F. and A. Mafouk, Measuring the mobility of skilled workers 1990-2000, World Bank, 2004.
- <sup>20</sup> The Guardian: Brain Drain "damaging" African Higher Education, March 17, 2006, [http://www.queensu.ca/samp/migrationnews/article.php?Mig\\_News\\_ID=2610&Mig\\_News\\_Issue=15&Mig\\_News\\_Cat=1](http://www.queensu.ca/samp/migrationnews/article.php?Mig_News_ID=2610&Mig_News_Issue=15&Mig_News_Cat=1)
- <sup>21</sup> There are codes of ethical conduct such as the *Commonwealth Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health Workers*, the *Melbourne Manifesto* and the "London Declaration" that outline principles of ethical conduct for countries recruiting health workers.