Adolescents’ rights, gender and migration

Challenges for Policy Makers

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APRIL, 2011
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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report reviews the literature and preliminary evidence on the impacts of migration on adolescents’ welfare and access to the realization of their rights. The review allows for identifying gaps in the evidence required for policy formulation. It stresses the need to approach adolescents’ migration from a gender and rights-focused lens and argues that adolescence is a vulnerable stage. Migration can add vulnerabilities and barriers for developing young peoples’ capacities for functioning in society and accessing their rights. An examination of migration-oriented policies in labor sending countries offers suggestions for strengthening migrant adolescents’ capacities through appropriate policies and interventions.

The review focuses on the risks, opportunities and consequences faced during the migration process that affect adolescents’ lives in different dimensions: education, health, work and psychosocial wellbeing. It examines three main groups of adolescents:

- Adolescents who remain in migrant sending countries, living in left-behind households;
- Adolescents migrating alone;
- Adolescents living in host countries, either alone or with their next of kin.

The analysis of surveys and case studies of the risks and opportunities that migration imposes on adolescents has identified girls’ vulnerabilities during all stages of the migration process. There were mixed results: one part of the studies emphasized the negative impacts of migration on the lives of the three groups of adolescents while the other part stressed the opportunities that migration can bring to young migrants.

Until now, the concern with children’s and adolescent’ rights has not interacted with the interest in migration and development. Research on migration’s impacts on adolescents may not be easily generalized, given that it is frequently based on country-specific case studies. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a basic understanding of the main dimensions of migration’s impacts on adolescents to serve as a starting point for formulating policy recommendations.

The findings of this review pose some questions: What are the factors contributing or hampering adolescents’ school and health performance in migrant sending countries? What circumstances can ease the negative psychosocial impacts of parents’ absence on adolescents? What policies can protect voluntary
adolescent migrants from exploitation and abuse? And, finally, in host countries, which policies can guarantee their social integration?

One conclusion of the review is that confronting the challenges posed by adolescent migration requires joint policy interventions among governments, international institutions and migrant organizations fostering adolescents’ rights. However, policy formulation must rest not only on evidence, but also on the results of quantitative and qualitative evaluations of policy implementation. The paucity of evaluations in the area of policies geared towards adolescents affected by migration can become an obstacle for advancing partnerships.

Policy recommendations include first, that planning rely on consistent data and accurate evaluations, and that policy adapt to context, given the heterogeneity of adolescents affected by migration. Second, promoting gender equality and empowerment in schooling, health and youth employment can help enhance successful transitions to adulthood for adolescent girls. Third, it is necessary to improve existing information on migration’s causes, composition and trends. Fourth, policy formulation requires an accurate diagnosis of the local provision of education and health services and of the local labour markets in areas of high emigration. Fifth, policy interventions in developing countries should be directed to all adolescents and not exclusively to those who are potentially migrants.
INTRODUCTION

This report examines the existing evidence on adolescents’ migration, its causes and impacts, with the purpose of contributing to the design of appropriate policies aimed at strengthening their capacities and securing the realization of their rights.

The existing information on adolescents’ migration is scarce. Research and social programs increasingly focus on children affected by migration—from birth to age 18—but there is not enough insight or evidence on those aged 12-18. There is need for more knowledge on the characteristics of adolescent migrants, on the age and gender composition of migrant flows, on their socioeconomic, work and educational backgrounds, on their families’ livelihood strategies at home, and on the conditions for the realization of their rights in the origin and host countries. The impacts of adolescents’ voluntary migration remain under-explored, as most studies and policy initiatives have concentrated on the vulnerabilities of refugees and trafficked boys and girls, obscuring the positive and negative consequences of migration for adolescents.

The estimates of world migration streams are seldom disaggregated by age, and because most research that focuses on adolescents with migration backgrounds is based on case studies, results may not be readily generalized. There are country-specific reports focusing on specific groups, and a considerable amount of case studies; however, the existing information does not allow for comparative systematic assessments of adolescent migration.

On the other hand, academics and practitioners have studied the patterns of transitions to adulthood—adolescence—of girls and boys in different cultures. This knowledge can be useful for understanding the impacts of migration on jeopardizing or enhancing the realization of adolescent rights.

Adolescents often migrate with scarce information about their destinations and living conditions in the host country and seldom access regular migration channels, resulting in heightened risks of abuse and exploitation. For this reason it is urgent to devise adequate policies directed toward enhancing migrant adolescents’ capabilities and choices.

The report emphasizes approaching adolescents’ migration from a gender and rights-based lens and acknowledging that adolescence is a vulnerable stage, and that migration can add vulnerabilities and barriers to developing young people’s capacities for functioning in society and accessing their rights. The review of migration-oriented policies in labor sending countries offers suggestions for strengthening migrant adolescents’ capacities with the appropriate policies and interventions.

The review focuses on the risks, opportunities and consequences faced in the migration process by three categories of adolescents:

- Adolescents who remain in migrant sending countries, living in left-behind households;
- Adolescents migrating alone;
- Adolescents living in host countries, either alone or with their next of kin.

Section one characterizes migration impacts on the three types of adolescents affected by migration. The second section highlights cases of policy initiatives that impacted positively on adolescents’ capacities. Section three presents conclusions as well as policy and program recommendations.
This section focuses on how migration can impact on adolescents’ rights and welfare. It is based on research studies that permit a glimpse of some of the main risks adolescents face during the different stages of the migration process. The overview allows for the characterizing of certain common challenges faced by adolescents. However, it also shows that the interest in adolescents’ migration is in its initial stages, and for this reason it is still too soon to arrive at general conclusions that are applicable to different countries or regions.

Analyzing the impacts of migration on adolescents’ wellbeing and access to their rights requires acknowledging the vulnerabilities of adolescence, as well as gender-specific aspects, including culturally determined gender roles, education, work and migration trajectories. The process of ‘coming of age’ involves a set of biological, psychological and social transformations, including transitions from school to work, leaving home, forming a new family, getting married, and having children. The relationship between biological age and social age is a complex one, and is produced in different ways in different cultures; that is, coming of age takes place according to social conventions and cultural factors.

Adolescents face tensions and paradoxes. In spite of the recent gains in accessing education and new technologies, their opportunities for finding employment, participating in decision-making or achieving autonomy are limited. Gender norms influence the distribution of risks between girls and boys; girls are vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse, while early marriage is extended in certain regions.¹ Pregnancy, delivery complications and insecure abortions are the main causes of adolescent girls’ morbidity and mortality in developing countries, while violence is the main threat faced by adolescent boys. In Mexico, Colombia or Brazil drug barons recruit young boys, while in Sudan, Tanzania or Sierra Leone, they have been recruited by irregular armies.² Health-care systems are not prepared to deal with adolescents’ specific health risks: accidents, physical aggression, drugs, sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.³ The sensitive issues of adolescent reproductive health require information, education and services for equipping them to shape their future (UNFPA, 2004).

Many of the biological, psychological and social transformations experienced during the transition to adulthood impact the decision to migrate and at the same time shape the experience of migration. Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable during the various stages of migration: in sending countries girls are at risk of being made responsible for household chores, helping or replacing their mother. In transit, girls face the dangers of irregular migration, and are often sexually threatened or abused. In receiving countries, both in Latin America and Asia, migrant girls suffer the hardest circumstances (Lloyd, 2009).

Once adolescents leave home, migration entails finding new living arrangements, finding employment, and forming their own households. The nature of youth transitions shapes the type of migration that young people undertake (Lloyd, 2004; Punch, 2009). Migration increases the challenges adolescents face by changing their expectations about adult work and family life (Lloyd, et al, 2005). For example, in Sri Lanka a young person who is married will be seen and will see him or herself as an adult, and girls from poor households often start migrating for work or marriage at age 12 (Lloyd, 2004).

According to Tienda et al (2007), in the discourse on migration and development, children and adolescents are absent, except when it points at adolescents as victims of trafficking and abuse in general. Country surveys on adolescent migration reveal some commonalities but also several differences; adolescent migrants’ socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as the causes and motivations for migrating are far from

¹ In Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia 30 per cent of girls aged 15-19 are married (UNFPA, 2004).
³ Boys and girls aged 15-24 account for half of all new HIV infections, with girls and women especially at risk.
homogenous. Part of the studies argues that unemployment is the principal driver of adolescent migration (van der Glind, 2010). Other views stress the role of both push factors in the origin country—lack of employment and educational opportunities, the will of contributing to their parents’ maintenance—and pull factors in destination countries captivating the imagination of adolescents—improvement of wellbeing, greater access to consumption. Studies in Nepal, Cambodia, Bolivia and Central America found that deprived adolescent girls and boys envisaged migration as the more viable survival strategy (Adhikari and Pradhan, 2005).

The following sections focus on how migration affects the wellbeing and development of adolescents living in migrant households in their countries of origin, on adolescents migrating alone, and those living in host countries alone or accompanied.

**ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND BOYS IN LEFT BEHIND HOUSEHOLDS**

In the literature one finds three main strands of theories and research assessing migration and remittances’ impacts on households with children and adolescents in areas of high out-migration:

- One that focuses on the role of increases in household income on food consumption, investment and expenditure on education and health, and how this affects children and adolescents’ schooling and access to health-care services.
- Another that assesses the role of migration on households’ dynamics and on children’s and adolescents’ psychosocial wellbeing, and its impact on adolescent schooling and health.
- A third group that examines stigmatizing or exclusionary attitudes toward left behind adolescents among members of the community.

In each of these strands researchers have found positive, negative and ‘neutral’ impacts of migration on adolescents. Part of the research shows that adolescents’ education and health have improved through increases in remittances’ income, but there are also findings showing that there were no changes or that the results were negative. Part of the analyses on family dynamics blame migration for adolescents’ deviant behavior, but other studies found that adolescents were able to mature because they had to adopt adults’ roles when their parents migrated. Some findings emphasize the stigmatization of adolescents left behind while others point at their upward mobility. Although seemingly contradictory, these strands provide complementary insights on migration’s impacts on adolescents’ wellbeing: they show that there is no such thing as a unique consequence of an increase in household income in terms of education or health-care access. Adolescents may improve their performance, although parents’ absence can create distress and hamper the potential benefits of higher household income on adolescents’ access to schooling and health. By the same token when new family arrangements replace the original family organization, parents’ absence does not necessarily become an obstacle for adolescents’ welfare. Or, communities’ reactions to adolescents in migrant households can be stigmatizing, but can also foster the former’s inclusion.

These studies show that the impacts of migration and remittances on adolescents’ realization of their rights are not direct. Rather, they are mediated by many factors: community and household arrangements, the level and composition of social investment, the nature and scope of networks, the quality of schools and health-care services, the length of parents’ stay abroad, and continuity of communications, among others.

The following sections examine the three strands of theories and research.
Remittances can improve left-behind households’ income, consumption of food and access to health services and schooling. Part of the studies conducted in different countries suggests that the reception of remittances has facilitated children and adolescents’ access to and regularity in schooling.

In South and Central American sending countries there is evidence on the influence of income from remittances on improving adolescents’ school performance, especially in poor rural areas (Docquier and Rapoport, 2003). In El Salvador, remittances contributed to reducing drop-out children and adolescents (Edwards and Ureta, 2003). Adolescents aged 12-17 with migrant parents from Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala increased their school enrolment more than their peers living in non-migrant households. In Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Korea researchers found increased enrolment and better school performance (Battistella and Gastardo-Conaco, 1998; Nguyen et al, 2006) among children with migrant parents.

Studies in Mexico and Pakistan found that migration reduced gender inequalities in school performance among adolescents living in migrant households. In Mexico Hanson and Woodruff (2003) and McKenzie and Rapoport (2006) found that adolescent girls completed more years of schooling than boys the same age. However, according to McKenzie and Rapoport, the difference did not arise from an improvement of girls’ retention but from boys’ dropping out from school for work. Mansuri (2006) examined the impacts of migration on school enrolment and retention of adolescent girls and boys aged 11-17 in rural Pakistan, comparing migrant and non-migrant households. She found large gender differences in overall rates of enrollment and retention in both groups of households, as girls dropped out more frequently before completing high school. The study also found that in migrant households the gender gap in school performance was smaller. Mansuri’s view is that increased income from remittances liberated girls from domestic chores that affected their school performance.

Regarding health outcomes, studies in Latin America generally found that remittances have positive impacts. Evidence from Mexico suggested that increased household income from remittances resulted in lower rates of infant mortality and higher birth weight (Hildebrant and McKenzie, 2005). At the same time, mothers in migrant households seemed to have increased their health-knowledge more than their counterparts living in households without migrants. Lopez Cordova (2004) found that in areas of high out-migration receiving remittances in Mexico, infant mortality decreased.

However Kanaiapuni and Donato (1999) concluded that in Mexican communities experiencing intense migration, the rates of infant mortality were higher than in the rest. A study in nine Latin American countries found that remittances had improved children and adolescents’ health in low income households, but only in Nicaragua and Guatemala (Fajnzilber and Lopez, 2007). In Asian countries like India and Bangladesh, researchers concluded that in migrant households’ children and adolescents have better nutrition and improved access to modern health and child-care services (Nguyen et al, 2006), although there are also risks of HIV transmission during visits or return migration, and of drug abuse among adolescents. Moreover, the permanent export of skilled nurses and doctors could be depleting origin countries’ health-care services (Nguyen et al, 2006).

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4 Hanson and Woodruff (2003) compared boys and girls aged 10-16 while McKenzie and Rapoport (2006) compared boys and girls ages 16-18.
There are different views on the psychosocial wellbeing of children and adolescents living in migrant households in their country of origin. Some maintain that the separation of the family can break down adolescents’ network support structures, as in the case of Mexican teenagers (Aguilera-Guzman et al., 2004). Others argue that when extended family systems help fill the vacuum left by migrant parents, adolescents in left behind households do not appear to suffer greater problems than their peers in non-migrant households (Bryant, 2005). This is not always the case, as in Moldova, where adults left in charge of left behind children and adolescents lack the required skills for dealing with the new roles. Another argument in this direction is that the improvements in communication can help ‘shorten’ the distance between children and adolescents living in the country of origin and their parents. However the frequency of communication varies, depending on migrants’ economic means, the location of the families or the gender of the parent in charge of the household. And some studies found that the lack of continuity in communications often creates misunderstanding within families (Parrenas, 2004). In Bolivia, when the father migrates children and adolescents remain under the mother’s supervision; when both migrate they live with their grandmother or other female relative; only exceptionally they remain in the care of a male relative or their father (Caggiano, 2010).

The growing demand for foreign labor in the care sector mainly in southern Europe has fuelled the feminization of migration; in emigration countries this aggravates care problems. Information from Romania shows that the strategies adopted by migrant families create difficulties in the provision of supervision and care of adolescents. Among other problems, when adolescents are left in the care of grandparents, the former have to deal with differences in mentality. According to informants the numbers of adolescents with migrant parents who were committing crimes was increasing. Other problems were deterioration of school performance, drop-outs, and deviant behavior (Piperno, 2007 and 2011).

In Asia there has been an increase in female migration while more men are living in left-behind households, as well as more elderly, who are charged with looking after their grandchildren. The side effects of parents’ migration are attributed to changes in family dynamics, in cases when the absence of a breadwinner increases the work burden for the remaining family members (Scalabrini Migration Center, 2003). Researchers found cases of a negative influence of parents’ migration in different countries: in Albania left-behind adolescents often dropped from school. In Mexico, parents’ absence in areas of high out-migration led to an increased incidence of work among adolescent boys and girls ages 15-17, hampering their school performance (Lopez Cordova, 2005). In Sri Lanka children of migrant mothers performed worse in school than those in non-migrant households (Save the Children, 2006:6). In Ecuador teachers, health workers and members of the local churches in areas with long-standing high levels of out-migration have reported that school performance among children in migrant households was poor, while drug and alcohol abuse were often detected (Pinos and Ochoa Ordoñez 1998).

Among adolescents, migration and educational attainment can become competing paths; adolescents who are planning to reunite with their migrant parents can lower their incentive to invest in education, counteracting remittances’ effects (Kandel, 2003; Chiquiar and Hansen, 2005). In Mexico migration increasingly attracts teenagers, causing high-school dropout; from this point of view the impact of migration and remittances on household income and on expenditure in education depends on how migration and education balance out (McKenzie and Rapoport, 2006). In rural Bangladesh, children in migrant households in which the mother was in charge fared better in school than in households headed by widowed mothers (Joshi, 2003).

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5 Bryant studied the cases of children and adolescents in migrant households in Philippines, Thailand and
In migrant-sending communities it is common to find that adolescents and youth consider themselves future migrants; there is a widespread ‘migration culture’. Migration is imposed by families and society as a path towards adulthood. In Tasmania, El Salvador, Philippines, Ecuador and Mexico for example, migration is viewed as a legitimate step in the process of growing up. In Mexican communities living transnationally is seen as the norm by its members (Sorenson and Olwig, 2002; Kandel and Massey, 2002). Migration can become a crucial social act for certain social groups, a central element of the process of transition from adolescence to adulthood, a sort of rite of passage (Massey et al 1994). In Soninke society in Mali, the ‘healthy’ man or adolescent is the migrant, and if they do not migrate adolescents are considered a social problem (Jonsson, 2008:10). In Romania, Piperno (2007) found a pervasive wish of migrating among adolescents whose parents were away.

In Morocco left-behind adolescent girls and boys face big problems because of large-scale unemployment; they resent their elders for leaving them in their homeland, and see migration as the only way out (de Haas, 2008).

c. STIGMATIZATION OF MIGRANT ADOLESCENTS

Adolescent boys and girls remaining in left-behind households have been labeled ‘fixed communities’ although they maintain relationships with migrants or ‘mobile communities’. In the literature there is abundant reference to the phenomenon of ‘involuntary immobility’, which refers to ‘an aspiration to migrate but the inability to do so’ (Carling, 2002). The ‘immobile’ left behind among adolescents encompass those who lack the means or permission to travel, whose lives are reshaped by the migration of household members. These groups are often stigmatized. In Ecuador there are studies showing that the local community tends to associate these adolescents with family disruptions, and they are often accused of being prone to alcoholism and drug abuse (Herrera and Carrillo, 2004). The argument of part of the studies is that the realities of left-behind children are less dramatic than the descriptions in the press or than in general, public opinion. However, the research on the psychological impacts of migration on adolescents and children in Ecuador is based on few case studies that show some examples of good performance of left-behind youngsters but do not suffice for demonstrating the positives over the negatives of migration.

In Bolivia, in an area of long-standing tradition of migration to Argentina, church deacons and secondary school teachers gave examples of adolescents’ misbehavior, attributable not only to the fact that they were free of parents’ supervision, but because they had money from remittances. Teachers were alarmed with the trajectories of children and adolescents left behind: they argued that parents left small children that became adolescents with no adult supervision, and that they ended drinking heavily, performing petty theft or associating with dangerous gangs (Caggiano, 2010: 74-75).

For adolescents being ‘sons or daughters of migrants’ is not a desired identity since it often associated with discrimination. In certain communities and schools in Ecuador there is a tendency to create spaces for adolescents of migrant parents, separating them from the rest; recent studies found that the separation between migrants and non-migrants can result in increased isolation and disintegration of left-behind adolescents (Carrillo, 2003).

Similar problems have arisen among Sri-Lankan adolescents left behind by parents who migrated to the Middle East. It appears that they have to deal, as children of migrants, with the social stigma attached to migrant families (Hettige and Salih, 2010).

ADOLESCENTS ON THE MOVE: CHALLENGES, RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES
This section examines existing research on migrant adolescents that travel on their own to reunite with their parents or for other reasons, and those who live in host countries.

a. CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS MIGRATING ALONE: SUBORDINATION OR AGENCY?

It is not always clear whether adolescents migrate alone or accompany other family members, obeying a family decision, or accompanying a husband. An overview of adolescent migration (McKenzie, 2007) found that the enforcement of age restrictions to work in developed countries explains that 90 percent of boys and girls aged 12-14 entering Canada and the United Kingdom lived with one or both parents, compared to less than 50 percent migrating to Cote d’Ivoire. Researchers have focused mainly on trafficked children rather than on independent child migrants; the lack of information suggests that most migration experiences are assumed to be harmful (Whitehead and Hashim, 2005:24).

Researchers of child and adolescent independent migration (Hashim, 2006; Whitehead and Hashim 2005; Thorsen 2005, 2007; , 2007) criticize a pervasive interpretation that the former are victims forced to move. In their view this interpretation is linked to an over-representation of child migration as necessarily involving child trafficking. Their point is that children and adolescents seek to migrate for many reasons; this does not necessarily mean that they have agency, but rather that they are capable of reaching their goals.

More recently the analysis of adolescent migration in Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mali (Riisoen et al, 2004) or Bolivian rural adolescents migrating to Argentina (Punch, 2002) shows that trafficking is not the main element in the migration process. Iversen (2002) argues that adolescents’ migration for work is not always the result of parents’ decisions; this author criticizes the stand claiming that migrant adolescents lack agency. He studied adolescents’ migration from rural India, concluding that boys, not girls, had migrated autonomously.

Adolescents from poor rural communities migrate out of necessity, searching for work opportunities, while some children are expelled from their households due to domestic abuse, or gender based discrimination (Riisoen et al, 2004; Iversen, 2002). Adult migration can also spur child migration where migration culture prevails.

A study on Central American and Ecuadorian adolescents (aged 12-17) in transit through Mexico to the United States (LACRO, 2010) examined their main reasons for moving. The majority of these adolescents’ parents had migrated: the younger ones intended to reunite with their parents and the older ones planned to find a job. In Peru, the statistical office\textsuperscript{6} conducted a survey among urban dwellers aged 15-29 to assess their intentions and motivations for migrating. The survey found that 62 per cent of adolescents aged 15-19 were willing to migrate, but only half of them planned to move within three years. When asked about their main reasons for wanting to emigrate, 45 per cent of adolescents responded that they were looking to improve their economic situation and 34 per cent said they planned to further their education (INEI, 2009).

In rural Bolivian communities\textsuperscript{7} adolescents find themselves confronted with a major decision: to continue with secondary school, which requires them to live in another community, to work without pay in their households, to seek paid work, or to migrate for agricultural or domestic work elsewhere in Bolivia or in Argentina. A 1996 study found that boys started migrating at ages 14-15, and girls at around age 18; half the adolescents had migrated to Argentina, while the other half remained in the area working without pay (Punch, 2007).

Hashim (2006) argues that income generation is only one aspect of children’s and adolescents’ decisions to migrate. In the case of Burkina Faso, Thorsen (2005, 2007) found that adolescents saw migration as part of

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\textsuperscript{6} The statistical office (INEI) in collaboration with UNDP, ILO, IOM and UNFPA; results in INEI, 2010.

\textsuperscript{7} In rural communities primary school starts at age 6 and is completed at 12 or 13 years of age.
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their transition to adulthood, and not exclusively as a matter of generating income. Furthermore, this author studied the causes of adolescents leaving school; her findings revealed that teachers’ absence, corporal punishment and lack of employment opportunities for school leavers were the main reasons for parents and children to choose migration as an alternative path. In this respect adolescents’ independent migration did not stem from family problems but from their ‘legitimate’ aspirations (Thorsen, 2007). These findings are compatible with those of Whitehead (2007) for Bangladesh, Ghana, Burkina Faso and India; qualitative interviews pointed out that among adolescents’ migration motives aspirations towards maturity and self-improvement were important, especially in areas of high out-migration in Africa. Furthermore, that migration takes place within social networks, and not through traffickers.

Among indigenous people in rural Guatemala there is a tradition of sending adolescents aged 14-17 to Chiapas in Mexico, where they are able to find employment through networks of other Guatemalan migrants. Parents expect that once abroad, their children will contribute to their subsistence; the idea of migrating is nurtured since childhood, and often parents wait until their children turn 13 to send them to Mexico. Adolescent boys generally travel on their own or with an adult, while girls travel in groups and are quickly employed as domestic servants in Mexican households (Giron, 2010). These adolescents send meager remittances to their parental households through informal mechanisms that help the survival of the remaining family members.

This strand of research and evaluation does not rule out the existence of trafficking nor of exploitation and abuse among adolescent migrants. However, it highlights the need to assess accurately which cases have to be tackled as trafficking, in order to design the appropriate policy tools for protecting autonomous migrant adolescents.

b. ADOLESCENTS IN HOST COUNTRIES: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

One of the more influential views on migrant adolescents living in host countries is the one developed, among others, by Portes et al (2005) who studied how adolescents who migrated with their family or are second generation migrants were prone to what was defined as segmented or downward assimilation. This idea describes the trajectories of adolescents whose social contacts are limited to their own ethnic or national group, and risk remaining in the margins of society and the labour market (UNDP, 2009). During field research this author found that a significant minority of second-generation migrants is being left behind educationally and occupationally, and actually assimilate to the ‘bottom’ of the social scale. Studies of migrants’ nationalities found differences among adolescents originated in their parents’ social origin or in the context of opportunities and disadvantages given that there is no such thing as a uniform process of assimilation. But there is some evidence on the causes of poor educational outcomes, related to the absence of parents and inner-city residence. Adolescent children of immigrants are relegated to low quality schools and neighborhoods, which can foster dropping out from school or joining gangs as possible outcomes.

Similar challenges were found among Ecuadorian adolescents arriving in Spain and Italy with the purpose of reuniting with their parents. Family reunification poses serious challenges as both adults and adolescents must reconstruct family relations after some time apart. During their mothers’ absence children often turn into adolescents in the homes of elder siblings or other family members. Once in the host country they must learn how to deal with yet another new household configuration: they lived in their ‘original’ family, when their mother or both parents migrated they lived in a different household, and arriving to the host country they frequently find new family members, including a new spouse and siblings (Lagomarsino, 2005; Queirolo, 2005).

The extended duration of family separation and the families’ limited capacities to support the newcomers in a challenging environment were difficult to surmount. Adolescents felt that they were losing ties with peers in their home country, and that it was difficult to replace old friendships with new ones, or to return to a system of parental control after having experienced a certain degree of autonomy. The difficulties to adapt to
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A totally new environment, a novel school system, and a different culture, were buffered by associating with other migrant adolescents. Research among adolescents in migrant households living in Genoa describes the difficulties faced since departure and arriving to their ‘new’ family, identifying the barriers to integration in schools and in society. More often than not their parents did not prepare their children for the journey, and they lacked the appropriate conditions for making them feel at home. On top of their personal difficulties within the new family, adolescents had to deal with economic problems, parents who worked long hours, and spending a lot of time on their own (Lagomarsino, 2005).

Migrant mothers of adolescents in Italy cited fearing what they see as ‘excessive freedom’ in the Italian school system and culture. The majority—66 per cent—of foreign born high school students in Genoa in 2003 were adolescents from Ecuador, Peru and other Latin American countries who were older than the local students in their class. Adolescents that at age 17 would have been finishing high school in their home country were forced to repeat high school and interact with younger children, in a new language. Adolescents perceived different forms of discrimination and rejection by adults in public spaces other than in schools, such as on buses, in the streets, or in parks (Queirolo Palmas, 2005).

Women migrants from Dominican Republic travelled with their adolescent daughters to Spain. On arrival the girls faced severe problems: they were frequently left in charge of heavy household duties that hampered school attendance (Gil, 1995). It is argued that adolescents’ search of identity in host countries clashes with existing cultural, social and income barriers; for this reason migrants from Latin America in the United States adopt an ethnic identity labeled as a ‘reactive’ identity (Martinez-San Miguel, 2001; Duany, 1994).

In sum, the effects on migrating children will depend on the causes of their moving, on the situation in the host country, whether they are able to work or study, the reception of their families, and the general situation they face in the new setting.

POLICY INITIATIVES

The following sections focus on policy initiatives developed in partnerships among local and international institutions. The experiences show that social policy interventions can contribute to initiating changes in the lives of left behind adolescents in areas of high outmigration. The following cases of policy implementation have not been subject to evaluation, which limits the scope of their future application.

a. PHILIPPINES, ECUADOR, EL SALVADOR AND BOLIVIA: INITIATIVES TARGETED TO ADOLESCENTS LIVING IN LEFT BEHIND HOUSEHOLDS

PHILIPPINES

UNICEF Philippines has partnered since 2008 with non-governmental and faith based organizations, including the Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiative (Atikha) and the Episcopal Commission of the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ECMI), to provide economic and social services to adolescents

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8 Reactive identities arise as opposition to exclusionary practices by members of the host society; they are also named as ‘resistance’ identities (Massey and Sanchez, 2010:18-30).
left behind. This joint effort aims to help address the social cost of migration and tap the development potential of migration, building the capacities of adolescents living in migrant households.

The UNICEF-Atikha project included developing a guide for primary and secondary school teachers, aimed at sensitizing boys and girls to the sacrifices of their migrant parents, to the values of education and savings, and to the importance of maintaining good communication within the family unit. It also seeks to impart to adolescents an understanding of gender equality. Overall, the goal is to teach the skills and knowledge needed to enhance talents and capabilities, as well as an understanding of rights and responsibilities as youth and citizens. The Department of Education has included Atikha’s modules in school curriculum in regions with large populations of left behind adolescents and families.

Atikha has also designed a guide for trainers to conduct seminars on financial planning for migrants and their families, including adolescents. The training guide provides hands-on experience in budgeting, goal-setting, and financial planning, helping migrants and their families to design savings and investment programs. Financial literacy seminars held in partnership with UNICEF also tackle family and social issues that put a strain on migrants’ finances and resources. They provide skills in peer counseling and help migrants and their families address family problems and concerns.

UNICEF is also working with ECMI to build the capacities of adolescents left behind. ECMI was organized by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines to build a community among migrants’ families akin to its Basic Ecclesial Communities. In close collaboration with teachers, guidance counselors and UNICEF, ECMI assists high school students and their migrant parents through counseling services and student achievement programs. ECMI works with schools to shape the values and character of the girls and boys left behind, including helping them to understand the sacrifices of their migrant parents.

ECMI’s achievement program aims to combat negative public perceptions of children and adolescents left behind and help them become responsible citizens, despite being separated from their parents and in the face of the many challenges posed by migration. The achievement program, known as Gawad Anak, is being implemented in high schools, where adolescents of migrants are selected by school officials according to their outstanding social, scholastic and extracurricular performance.

In interviews with students participating in ECMI’s programs, UNICEF has been able to validate its research findings on the impacts of migration on those left behind and has found that these girls and boys share with their parents the same longing for the Philippine government to create more employment opportunities so their parents can return home. The stories of these young people and others like them are published in a book entitled “Migrants’ Stories, Migrants’ Voices,” a collection of narratives that aims to convey the experiences of migrants abroad and the situations of their families left behind.

In an effort to give youth a voice on the subject of migration and its impacts, UNICEF Philippines together with ILO, Save the Children, Asia Acts and other NGOs, organized a policy debate on migration prior to the Second Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), held in Manila in 2008. During this debate, law students from Ateneo de Manila University of the Philippines and Mahidol University of Thailand were given the opportunity to deliberate on the economic and social costs of migration. Additionally, a youth caravan was organized where adolescents depicted how they were affected by migration through drawings, paper mache projects, drama and puppet shows. Their work was translated into posters, comics and other materials for policymakers and other stakeholders. Further, the voices of these young people and of those who participated in the policy debate were translated by NGOs into a common advocacy message, which was communicated during the Civil Society Days event of the 2008 GFMD in Manila.

The Government of the Philippines has developed a set of policies and institutions to enhance protection for migrants and families left behind, including adolescents. The Overseas Workers’ Welfare Administration (OWWA), in particular, manages a trust fund to support migrant workers and their families. The fund is pooled from membership contributions of Filipino migrants or their overseas employers. Filipino migrants and their families who contribute to the fund are eligible for a range of social services, including insurance and healthcare, as well as social services and family welfare, including family assistance loans. The
adolescents of migrant workers have access to education and training programs, including scholarships towards baccalaureate studies as well as the Tuloy-Aral project, which aids children of former migrant workers in continuing their elementary and high school education. The Tuloy-Aral project helps cover expenses, such as books, school supplies, materials for projects, transportation, authorized school contributions, and allowance for the whole school year.

A joint effort between the Philippine government, UNICEF, ILO and IOM is working to support vulnerable adolescents at risk of migration through the Youth, Employment and Migration Program (YEM), entitled “Alternatives to Migration: Decent Jobs for Filipino Youth.” Funded by the UNDP/Spanish Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund, the program seeks to create an enabling environment that will promote youth employment in the country and provide young people with life skills and vocational training. The program attempts to improve policy consistency and implementation by increasing youth participation, and to increase access to decent work for young women and men through partnerships.

UNICEF is presently supporting the government and partners in the development of a National Action Agenda on Youth Employment and Migration to inform national and local planning processes. A policy review of education, migration and employment policies is currently underway and will serve an input to the government’s Medium Term Youth Development Plan.

UNICEF succeeded in assuring partnership with civil society, non-governmental and faith based organizations, and in increasing adolescents’ participation. One of the main lessons learned in this process is that policy making requires accurate diagnosis of the living conditions and needs of left-behind migrant households.

BOLIVIA

UNICEF Bolivia is engaged in operational research on the situation of adolescents left behind that will support its efforts to mainstream migration into national social protection strategies. The country office recently conducted a qualitative analysis on the situation of adolescent girls in areas affected by migration, including Cochabamba. The study consisted of interviews with researchers and policymakers, as well as focus groups of adolescents and their caregivers. In particular, the researchers set out to test the hypothesis that adolescent girls left behind are particularly vulnerable and suffer from a higher incidence of household violence, sexual exploitation, school abandonment, teenage pregnancy.

The study made several recommendations, including:

- New quantitative representative data is needed to assess the impact of migration on adolescent girls at the national or regional levels.

- A threefold strategy for working closely with relevant public agencies and decision makers: (1) establish a research agenda to quantify and provide representative information on social protection and migration; (2) focus the research agenda to analyse and differentiate the two principal types of vulnerabilities faced by children and adolescents left behind: inner emotional-related and socially contextual; and (3) work with an institutional approach, providing evidence-based advocacy to improve the social protection network as it applies to migrant families. In particular, an institutional mapping exercise is needed to assess gaps in public service delivery.

In collaboration with UNICEF Bolivia and partners, the government is making strides in tackling several social, economic and political issues related to migration, as well as strengthening protection for the rights of children and families affected by migration. In that respect, public authorities are beginning to demand technical and financial assistance to develop a social network to protect children and adolescents against the social risks and vulnerabilities associated with migration.

The findings of this study have been helpful in advocating for more research and policy dialogue on the vulnerability of adolescents affected by migration, especially girls. The study has prompted discussion and
agreements with the government through its Ombudsman and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It has also helped pave the way for an agenda oriented at research and policy advocacy, and subsequent policy recommendations, to improve the social protection of children affected by migration. Finally, as a result of this study, UNICEF has been invited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be part of, and provide technical assistance to, the Coordination Mechanism that brings together several government ministries and agencies to discuss migration policies and develop migration legislation.

UNICEF Bolivia is also advocating for the need to mainstream migration issues into social protection—both by securing access for migrants to current social programs and by creating new ones, including strategies to protect adolescent girls affected by migration. Social protection strategies should aim to address several dimensions of adolescent girls’ welfare, which are often the root causes of migration, including gaps in income, health, education, security, discrimination and social exclusion.

**ECUADOR**

The government of Ecuador has taken significant steps to protect children and families affected by migration, including the establishment of the National Ministry for Migrants (SENAMI) and the creation of the Migration Human Development Plan. UNICEF Ecuador is working with government agencies, including SENAMI, research centres and civil society in order to build the capacity of national and local institutions to address the needs of children and adolescents affected by migration.

As a result of the work of UNICEF and partners to mainstream migration into public policies, the government has adopted the handbook, *Human Mobility and Children’s Rights*, which outlines institutional procedures to address the claims of girls and boys affected by migration. This handbook was developed based on the voices of youth, published in the participatory study “Mi Opinión Si Cuenta.”

In addition, UNICEF, UNFPA, ILO, UNDP, IOM, are supporting SENAMI in its efforts to protect the rights of vulnerable adolescents through the implementation of a joint UN program, “Youth, Employment and Migration,” funded by the UN-Spain Millennium Development Fund. The program aims to enhance the social and economic opportunities for young men and women experiencing situations of social, economic, gender, territorial and cultural inequities. The program aims to do this by including young people in the labor market, fostering of profitable employment and economic enterprises, promoting the coordinated implementation at regional level of national youth-employment policies, along with those on socio-economic inclusion and migration, focusing on the economic, social and cultural rights of young people, and strengthening the systems that protect the rights of young people and the governance of public policies backed by the civic participation of young people. This initiative will provide young people with access to a job that is decent and productive while working toward gender equality.

**EL SALVADOR**

Migration has great implications for the lives of women, adolescents and children in El Salvador. In order to better understand these implications, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with UNICEF, UNFPA and IOM, is engaged in research on the effects of the migration on Salvadorian youth. Preliminary findings indicate that some of the variables related to the impact of migration on children and adolescents are: involvement of adolescents in gangs, an increase in drug consumption, devaluation of economic resources, increased consumerism and waste, adolescent pregnancy and dysfunctional families.

In addition, UNICEF El Salvador, IOM, UNFPA and UNDP have conducted research on migration and women as a first step towards a greater understanding of the impact of migration on children and adolescents left behind. The main objective is to inform policies concerning the children and adolescents of migrant families

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from a family perspective and to identify best practices addressing children and women left behind by national, public and private institutions, as well as by international partnerships.

b. CHINA, ALBANIA, MEXICO AND WEST AFRICA: ADOLESCENTS MIGRATING ALONE

CHINA

Policies that address the nexus between youth, employment and migration with a gender focus are needed to enhance protection of the rights of adolescents in China. In particular, policies that enable Chinese adolescents, especially girls, to stay in school and prepare themselves to enter the labor market, or that enable them to make informed decisions before migrating, are necessary to ensure their wellbeing before, during and after the migratory process.

The Chinese government is working to enhance protection of the rights of young migrants and to address the disparities between urban, rural and migrant populations. In recent years, a series of laws and policies have been promulgated and implemented to improve migrant workers’ access to equal labor rights, civil rights, basic public services, and social security. However, further rights-based interventions are needed to accelerate the implementation of the new laws and policies.

In February 2009, a joint program funded by the UN-Spain Millennium Development Fund Thematic Window on Youth, Employment and Migration (MDG-F YEM) was launched on Protecting and Promoting the Rights of China’s Vulnerable Young Migrants. The MDG-F YEM program brings together nine UN agencies (ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIFEM, WHO, UNIDO, UNV) in close coordination and partnership with over twenty national counterparts, including government agencies, civil society organizations and research institutions. The MDG-F YEM program is an important step towards ensuring the rights of young migrants, especially of adolescent girls. The program’s three main objectives are to:

1) Improve policy frameworks and policy implementation, with full stakeholder participation;
2) Promote better access to decent work for vulnerable young people through pre-employment education and training; and
3) Protect the rights of vulnerable young migrants through improved access to social and labor protection.

Overall, the MDG-F YEM program provides an unprecedented opportunity to ensure that the response to the largest movement of people in modern times is rights-based, poverty-focused, and fully informed by international good practice. It is also a significant step forward in the continuing process of UN reform to “deliver as one” at the country level to protect the rights of vulnerable Chinese youth.

In order to improve policy frameworks and policy implementation, with full stakeholder participation, the MDG-F YEM program aims to: (1) develop a platform for migration research information exchange, and (2) strengthen advocacy and capacity building among key stakeholders. Within this program, pilot policy implementation models are tested that incorporate the participation of migrants in policy dialogue through civil society organizations.

During 2009, MDG-F YEM program partners conducted research on migration trends and policies, focusing on domestic workers, the majority of whom are young women. A consultation was held on a range of issues including contracts and good recruitment practices, and was attended by domestic service companies, women’s federations, UNIFEM and civil society organisations. The aim was to promote better treatment of
migrant women and girls by their employers, ensuring decent work conditions and reducing their vulnerability to trafficking.

The MDG-F YEM program also aims to improve access to non-formal education and vocational training to prevent premature entry into the labor force, increase decent work opportunities and promote self-employment. UNICEF is working to develop flexible courses, with a gender focus, for rural out-of-school youth to allow them to continue working while developing skills. The efforts aim to prevent adolescents from dropping out of school and migrating too early; prepare young migrants to enter the labor market; and improve their entrepreneurial capabilities, thereby reducing unemployment among young people.

Additionally, partners are piloting a comprehensive safe migration information and life-skills training package for young migrants, developed with gender sensitive content and methodologies. The trainings are designed to educate potential young migrants on their rights. MDG-F YEM partners are also working to promote a registration system for migrant children under the age of 16 and to strengthen implementation and enforcement of existing legislation for migrant workers. UNICEF in particular is working with partners to improve the registration incidence of young migrants in two prominent destination cities. Over 220,000 migrant children and adolescents (of which more than 100,000 are girls) have been registered thus far, enabling their access to basic social services, particularly health and education. Additionally, over 15,000 community workers, including police officers, teachers and health workers have been trained in children’s rights and the procedures for registering migrant children and adolescents.

Finally, the MDG-F YEM is working to improve access to social and labor protection for young migrants by establishing model community service centers in pilot cities and by promoting the use of appropriate health services by migrant youth. Partners have focused on developing and testing health promotion models that aim to support the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, to which young migrants, especially girls, are vulnerable.

ALBANIA

A significant number of return migrants to Albania are aged 12-24 (McKenzie, 2007). These young Albanians represent important human, financial and social capital, as they return from abroad with the skills, savings and social networks needed to make substantial contributions to the national economy. Furthermore, the return of young Albanian migrants, including those who have studied abroad, is contributing to a more efficient and legitimate institutional culture in the country.

Despite the potential benefits of return migration, there are structural obstacles to return that often deter young Albanians from coming home. These include the lack of employment opportunities in the public sector, often caused by nepotism in both the university and public administration system. Additionally, low salaries, as well as the lack of opportunity to utilize the skills and education attained abroad, discourage the return of many young migrants.

In order to promote the return of young migrants, as well as to prevent their further marginalization and poverty in adulthood, efforts are needed to address high unemployment rates and the lack of educational opportunities in the country. In particular, vocational and technical assistance is required to prepare young people to enter the formal labor market and to reduce unemployment and migration. Additionally, it is necessary to maintain contact with the student diaspora and to increase job opportunities for them in order to encourage their return and facilitate their contribution to the Albanian economy.

In an effort to address the challenges faced by Albanian youth, in 2008 the Government of Albania and the United Nations, supported by the Spanish Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund, launched a joint program on Youth, Employment and Migration (MDG-F YEM). The program, entitled “Youth migration: Reaping the benefits and mitigating the risks in Albania,” aims to provide more employment opportunities for young people and improve national strategies on youth, employment, and migration. Specifically, the
program targets young workers in the regions of Shkodra and Kukes, which are particularly affected by informal employment and youth migration. It also seeks to connect with the student diaspora and to facilitate their return and employment in the formal sector, in particular by leveraging partnerships with organizations in the private sector.

UNICEF is collaborating in the MDG-F YEM program with ILO, IOM, and UNDP, and is responsible for establishing the coordination mechanism on youth employment at the local level. UNICEF is also taking a lead role in supporting staff development programs for 60 National Employment Service counselors of the Kukes and Shkodra offices. The counselors provide career guidance services for unemployed and underemployed youth. In addition, UNICEF supports youth livelihood and job skills training programs, run by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, local employment offices, training institutions, schools and the private sector.

In order to mitigate the risks of youth migration and address its root causes, the MDG-F YEM program is implementing labor market programs to help at-risk youth in the regions of Kukes and Shkodra to develop skills for various work opportunities. These labor market programs aim to ease the transition into decent work for underemployed youth and informal young workers, as well as to support entrepreneurship and the transition of young workers into the formal economy. In addition, the programs help inform young people about the opportunities and risks associated with migration in Albania and abroad.

Finally, a model for Youth Employment Services (YES) has been set up in Shkodra, which assists young people in finding employment and provides counseling, career guidance services, and education opportunities. Furthermore, IOM has initiated a national survey on the link between informal employment and youth migration, which aims to unveil some of the challenges to be addressed by policy makers.

The MDG-F YEM program also seeks to increase the positive impact of migration by strengthening the links between communities of origin and the Albanian diaspora. Innovative web-based tools and social networks are being used to help identify and engage young Albanian students graduating from foreign universities, in order to connect them with opportunities in the Albanian labor market. The program has also leveraged the active participation of the private sector in order to create employment opportunities and further encourage the return of young Albanian migrants.

**MEXICO**

Protecting the rights of unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents has been one of the key priorities of UNICEF México in recent years. UNICEF México has supported the strengthening of government and civil society capacity on several fronts, to the extent that Mexico now exercises leadership in international fora on the rights of migrant children and adolescents, including as the Chair and host of the fourth annual Global Forum on Migration and Development in November 2010.

The Mexican government has also made considerable efforts to ensure that the rights of children and adolescents within the migration process are visible in international fora, and has therefore launched a series of international meetings to bring the protection of children to the agenda in such discussions, and promote the exchange of good practices.

Furthermore, regional guidelines for the Protection of Unaccompanied Migrant Children were approved in 2009 in the Regional Conference on Migration and will be applied in eleven countries throughout North and Central American and the Dominican Republic. Finally, as Pro-Tempore President, Mexico set an ambitious agenda in the RCM on child rights, linked with the preparations for the Global Forum on Migration and Development in November 2010.

UNICEF is an active participant on the Inter-Institutional Panel on Unaccompanied Child and Adolescent Migrants and Migrant Women, launched in March 2007. The panel aims to develop public policies and coordinate programs aimed at the protection of this highly vulnerable population. It brings together some 17
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institutions ranging from public authorities such as the National Family Development System, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Migration Institute, among others, to international agencies (including UNICEF, IOM, UNHCR, and UNIFEM) in order to advance its agenda. The panel has developed a model to protect unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents, which was awarded increased national funding in the Mexican Congress in 2009.

To ensure immediate and appropriate care for repatriated children and adolescents, eight special care units, run jointly by the National Family Development System and the National Migration Institute, have been set up next to Migration Units in northern border areas. These special care units provide migrant children and adolescents with medical attention, as well as access to food, water, rest and communication with their families. These needs are met before the children and adolescents are interviewed, their situation is evaluated, and appropriate action is taken.

In addition, a network of twenty-seven transitory shelters is run by the National Family Development System, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, to protect children and adolescents identified as unaccompanied. Contact is made with their families and arrangements are made for their safe return home. Telephone lines have been installed in migration units and special care units in 21 states by the communications corporation Nextel, to allow migrant children and adolescents to contact their families, free of charge.

A special corps of Child Protection Officers was created within the National Migration Institute in 2008. By 2010, 330 of these officers had been trained in child rights and sensitive interviewing techniques, in an effort to better detect the situation and special risks of each child passing through immigration services. Training modules have now been delivered by the Mexican Migration Institute staff to their counterparts in Guatemala and El Salvador, and further such trainings are planned for Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

To respond to the wide-ranging needs of undocumented migrant children and adolescents at Mexico’s southern border, UNICEF joined IOM and UNDP in supporting the Chiapas state government in setting up a Reference Centre for adolescents to ensure their access to comprehensive and rights-based care services. In order to better inform policy development, UNICEF has promoted greater desegregation by age and gender of routine government information. Disaggregated data on the profile and situation of children and adolescents is now being collected as part of the regular Northern Border Migration Survey, and a special assessment has also been undertaken of the profile of over 92,000 repatriated children and adolescents who passed through transitory shelters operated by child protection services during the period from 2002 to 2007.

The situation and voice of children and adolescents—those “left behind”, those trying to reunite with their parents, and those who have been repatriated to Mexico or Central America—have received public attention through drawings, photographs and radio spots prepared by children and adolescents as part of the National Week of Debate on Migration. In addition, videos and documentaries have been produced on migrant children and adolescents, with the support of UNICEF México Goodwill Ambassador Julieta Venegas.

Due to the efforts of the aforementioned organizations, institutions, and individuals, over 20,000 children and adolescents in the repatriation process either to or from Mexico, now count on a national system for their protection, including immediate direct care, specialized attention and separate accommodation from adults, and communication with and safe return to their families and communities of origin. The special corps of Child Protection Officers has reported increased detection of, and response to, cases of trafficking, sexual exploitation and violence affecting children and adolescents migrating alone, as well as in the cases of asylum petitions of children. In addition, claims for international protection made by children and adolescents in Mexico increased from four in 2007 to 22 in 2009.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

This review and synthesis of the academic and policy literature on migrant adolescents shows a divide between two main positions: one that refuses to adopt a critical stand concerning the impacts of migration on adolescents living in their own country in left behind households, migrating independently or living in host countries, and another that tends to stress the negative psychosocial impacts, denying the possible opportunities that migration can offer to adolescents.

The first stand stresses the idea of ‘agency’ rather than that of ‘victimization’ of children and adolescent migrants. Concerning left behind adolescents, part of these studies suggest that the extended family and improvements in communication technologies can allow for continuing contacts between absent mothers and adolescent children, buffering parents’ absence. Some authors contest the idea that mothers’ migration will necessarily have negative impacts on left behind adolescents. This line of interpretation emphasizes that it is necessary to differentiate between autonomous and forced migration.

The opposite view puts emphasis on the negative impacts of family disruption on both left-behind adolescents and those living in host countries; furthermore, authors assume that the causes of independent adolescent migration are related with push factors, forced migration and trafficking rather than with autonomous moves.

This review has not arrived at general conclusions on the wellbeing and rights’ impacts of migration on adolescents, given the lack of evidence-based studies concentrating on the different stages of migration. The existing findings are often restricted to qualitative studies with limited coverage and are context specific. Identifying the causes behind decisions to migrate and evaluating the impacts of migration on adolescents will require comparing the situation of migrant adolescents with that of similarly positioned adolescents in their countries of origin. Likewise, evaluating the impacts of migration in host countries needs an examination of how migrants fare compared to native adolescents on various aspects of wellbeing and access to rights.

For adolescents, capitalizing on migration requires acquiring skills for managing risks and becoming productive citizens. However this goal faces barriers as they are invisible to policy analysts and prone to exploitation. The process of skill acquisition can only become possible by investing in social development and physical wellbeing and by guaranteeing their rights.

The results suggest that adolescents are aware of their vulnerabilities, of the risks of migration, and of the difficulties entailed by the whole process. In spite of these difficulties, surveys of potential or actual adolescent migrants show that migration has captured the imagination of adolescents in most countries and regions of high migration, not only among the poorest or in the least developed countries. The more salient aspects of the studies are the ones pointing at the common characteristics of adolescence: they are in a process of constructing their sexual, social and national identities, and migration can exacerbate the difficulties inherent in these transitions. These difficulties become apparent among adolescents who live in new family arrangements when left by migrant parents, and when they face a new environment after migrating on their own or even for reuniting with their family. In the first case migration can perpetuate traditional gender based division of labor in the household and in society, intensifying girls’ time-use in household chores, and imposing barriers for furthering their education, or increasing boy’s responsibilities in income-generating activities. This scenario can take place when either the mother or the father migrates. This review found that there are significant differences in migration’s impacts across genders stemming from the different roles assigned to boys and girls in different cultures. This explains the differences in the risks
described above that are faced in left-behind households, in transit or in host countries by adolescent boys and girls.

The arrival to host countries represents a serious challenge for adolescents; case studies found that migrant parents can act as barriers to their children social integration. Besides, the host societies are increasingly hostile to migrant adolescent culture, and in some cases automatically associate young migrants with gang formation and crime.

Further work is also necessary to better understand how migration’s impacts vary depending on the location where the transition from childhood to adolescence and to adulthood takes place happens. It is important to distinguish among (a) children becoming adolescents in their own country, without one or both parents; (b) children entering adolescence in the host country without their peers (c) those migrating as adolescents. Furthermore, it is increasingly important to be able to differentiate the risks of ‘being a migrant adolescent girl or boy’ from the barriers imposed by explicit restrictive migration policies, or the barriers imposed by exclusionary social settings.

Both origin and destination countries should bear in mind that single policy responses are not sufficient for tackling the challenges posed by adolescents in the move, in left-behind communities and households. The design of appropriate policy responses requires accurate and reliable data on population movements, on the living conditions of migrant communities, and the living conditions at arrival in host countries. Acknowledging the diversity of experiences will allow partners in development—governments, international development organizations and NGOs—to devise and implement policies contributing to the construction or strengthening of adolescent and adults’ migrants’ capacities which can enable them to overcome barriers to the realization of their rights.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Migration processes are influenced by the prevailing conditions in the origin and destination countries and a proper consideration of these is fundamental for policy design. Potentially promising policies will have to adapt to context, given the heterogeneity among adolescents in general and among those affected by migration. The review of the policy initiatives shows that it is possible to enhance the positive impacts of migration through such appropriate policy initiatives. The task ahead is to make the necessary partnerships and create the means and conditions to continue to do so.

Policies fostering gender equality and empowerment in schooling, health and youth employment can help enhance successful transitions to adulthood for adolescent girls. It is important to collect reliable information on the patterns governing the gender division of responsibilities within migrant households, identifying gender inequalities that may hamper the opportunities of both girls and boys. Acknowledging cultural and gender differences is not sufficient for efficient programming; it is also necessary to improve existing information, not only on population stock and flows, but also on the root causes of migration.

An accurate diagnosis of the local provision of education and health services and of the local labor markets in areas of high emigration is useful for generating programs targeted at all adolescents and not exclusively to those who are potentially migrants. However, there is room for gearing efforts towards making visible the risks of girls at risk of early marriage, or the boys at risk of violent environment and unprotected and precarious work.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNICEF PROGRAMMING

Even if adolescents who migrate are not always the poorest, adolescent migration can be interpreted as one of the strategies of pursuing their livelihood; for this reason, the design of policies for improving migrant adolescents’ access to realizing their rights should be a part of more general and inclusive social policies. Acknowledging the vulnerability of migrant adolescents means recognizing the specific harms they risk at the different stages of the migration process. It also means prioritizing their welfare, and contributing to their maturity.

UNICEF's programming should avoid targeting migrant adolescents, both those in left-behind households and potential migrants, because targeted programs can deepen inequalities, contributing to the perception of migrant adolescents as objects of protection and not subjects of rights. A fairer society can only be achieved through the implementation of comprehensive systems of social protection, consisting of sets of public policies underpinned by human rights.

The guiding idea is that UNICEF’s programming should group adolescent migrants together with other vulnerable groups that have little or no capacity for realizing their rights. The proposed programs and policies should be geared towards enabling adolescent migrants to access the realization of their rights, and framing social policy interventions and civil society actions on children and adolescent rights.

UNICEF has the skills and possibilities for jointly working with other organizations with a view at creating an interdisciplinary research and policy network, capable of giving voice to adolescents in the ongoing discussions on migration and development. One conclusion of the review is that facing the challenges posed by adolescent migration requires joint policy interventions among governments, international institutions and migrant organizations fostering adolescents’ rights. However, policy formulation has to rest on evidence, but also on the results of quantitative and qualitative evaluations of policy implementation. The paucity of evaluations in the area of policies geared towards adolescents affected by migration can become an obstacle for advancing the construction of partnerships.
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