

**SIXTH COORDINATION MEETING ON  
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Population Division  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
United Nations Secretariat  
New York, 26-27 November 2007

**THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION ON  
CHILDREN LEFT-BEHIND\***

*Jeronimo Cortina\*\**

---

\*The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

\*\*UNICEF DPPP – GPS/SIS & University of Houston, 447 Philip G. Hoffman Hall, Houston, TX 77204-3011,  
[www.jeronimocortina.com](http://www.jeronimocortina.com)

## *The Impact of International Migration on Children Left-Behind*

Jeronimo Cortina\*  
UNICEF DPPP – GPS/SIS & University of Houston  
447 Philip G. Hoffman Hall  
Houston, TX 77204-3011  
[www.jeronimocortina.com](http://www.jeronimocortina.com)

### *Introduction*

International migration flows have increased substantially over the past decades. Today, around three percent of the world population resides in a country other than where they were born (DESA 2003). Even though, proportionally speaking, this number is still small, international migration and its impact in receiving and sending societies are receiving unprecedented attention at the policy level. While much work has been done to ascertain the consequences of international migration on receiving societies, not enough attention has been paid to assessing its impact on sending countries and specifically on the left-behind<sup>2</sup>. The main reason for the lack of research in this area is the scarcity of reliable national-level data on the incidence and magnitude of international migration (of adults or children) with a focus on those left-behind. There is thus a growing interest in quantifying the volume of international migration flows and assessing their economic and social implications, especially in countries of origin. More research and comparable global data on the effects of migration is needed in order to make children more visible in migration debates and policies.

In order to formulate policy recommendations that enhance children's welfare, there is a need for reliable data that allow the assessment of positive and negative effects of migration. UNICEF, in collaboration with UNDP's Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, ILO, and UN-DESA has initiated policy research and operational pilot survey work on the impact of migration on the left-behind, in two countries (Albania and Ecuador)

This briefing note is organized as follows: first, it presents an overview of the instrument; second, it addresses main areas of discussion concerning the sampling strategy recommended for the implementation of the pilot survey in two countries; finally, the last section of this document presents an overview of progress made in the field so far; concluding remarks to address initial lessons learned and proposed next steps.

---

\*The views expressed in this paper are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the University of Houston.

<sup>2</sup> Some exceptions are the work by Battistella & Gastardo-Conaco 1998, Cortes 2006, Yeoh & Lam 2006 and the work sponsored by the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants as well as UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre.

## *Overview of the Survey*

The survey focuses on gauging the impact that migration (from the father or mother or both) may have on the household, paying special attention to children left-behind. The instrument is built upon UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) methodological scaffolding with an emphasis on international migration's material and immaterial impact on the left-behind, seeking to complement traditional MICS modules, which already focus on other important aspects such as education, household characteristics, child discipline, and child labor among others. The instrument modules, on the other hand, focus on health (non-disease-specific items to value health-related quality of life), life satisfaction, parental migratory information and remittances. The versatility of MICS allows researchers to implement a wide combination of modules that adapts best to their research agenda.

The migration module uses proxy respondents to gather general information regarding the parents living abroad (individually). Namely, the migration module, gathers information on:

1. Place of residence
2. How and when they left their country of origin for the first time (who paid for the trip, who helped them to leave, how long it took them to get to their place of residence, what kind of transportation, if they migrated with or without documents, if they migrated through a government sponsored program)
3. Main occupation or type of job carried out before and after migrating
4. Household goods inventory before migration
5. Communication patterns between migrants and those left-behind

The international remittances module focuses on collecting information on:

1. how long after leaving did the parent first send money
2. when was the last time that they sent money; how often they send money, what methods does the parent use to send money, and on average how much they send each time

At the household level, this module gathers information on:

1. The purposes of remittances
2. If receiving the money has allowed the household to do specific activities
3. If they get instructions on how to spend the money
4. Who administers the money that family members send from abroad
5. If they send money for collective purposes and to whom
6. If the person living abroad pays any expenses of those left-behind

## *Methodology*

To study the impact of international migration on a population that is inherently small in size, difficult to find and/or that is widely dispersed geographically and in the target population, it is necessary to utilize specific methods to estimate the prevalence of migration and the quantities of interest (Lohr 1999). In order to gauge the impact of international migration on the left-behind,

it is necessary to design a sampling frame that contains households where one or more parents have an international migration experience and households without such members.

A migrant household is defined as a household with children (0-17 yrs. of age) in which at least one parent (mother or father) who belongs or is still considered a member of that household has moved to live in a foreign country. A non-migrant household on the other hand, is a household with children (0-17 yrs. of age) in which no parents have ever moved away from the household.

There are various sampling strategies to allow the estimation of the prevalence of international migration and of the characteristics of interest. For the purpose of this study, we adopted the two-phase sampling strategy devised by the researchers at the Statistical Bureau of the European Commission (Eurostat) and the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NiDi) (see Groenewold & Bilsborrow 2004, Schoorl et.al 2000). This strategy constructs regions following predetermined criteria (low vs. high economic level and low vs. high migration prevalence), classifying its areas and creating strata according to the estimated prevalence of households with international migration experience. The strata with higher expected prevalence of migrant households are over-sampled and households within the selected areas are pre-screened in order to identify migrant and non-migrant households, which in turn are classified in strata and migrant households are over-sampled.

To compensate for the disproportionately high selection probability of migrant households, it is necessary to create sample design weights defined as the ratio between the probability proportional to estimated size (PPES) selection divided by the actual selection probability (Groenewold & Bilsborrow 2004, Schoorl et.al 2000).

In each country, a pilot survey of 300 interviews (150 migrant households and 150 non-migrant households) will be implemented by the end of this year. The data will be circulated among a panel of experts, research partners and stakeholders to evaluate the results of the pilot survey and future steps.

### ***Field Progress & Institutional Partners***

After establishing institutional partnerships with Ecuador's (INEC), Albania's Census offices (INSTAT) and interested stakeholders; preliminary work has been started at the country level. The Ecuador country team jointly with the *Observatorio de los Derechos de la Niñez*, a model NGO that monitors children's rights in that country, conducted preliminary tests in rural and urban communities where migration is prevalent as well as in communities where migration is rare. As a result of this work in the field, some questions and response-scales were modified in order to increase their comprehension. Questions on remittances were modified with local stakeholders to reflect the Ecuadorian migratory experience. Moreover, the team revised the sampling recommendations and made adjustments to some technical definitions. The adjustments were made taking into consideration target population issues to increase the variability of cases included in the sample and to maximize the incidence of responses in the pilot survey currently underway.

UNICEF Ecuador country team and partners conducted 4 focus groups in order to pre-test some modules to verify their validity and to improve, where necessary, the user friendly format of the questionnaire. In addition, the country team investigated other issues related to migration and children-left behind. The preliminary results of the focus-groups confirmed that questions were understood and did not pose any risks to the target population in terms of infringing their human rights.

The Albania country team has evaluated the feasibility of adapting the Ecuadorian experience in Tirana and adjusting it to local conditions. Some field visits have been carried out to verify that technical specifications and conditions were in place to begin the implementation of the pilot survey in Albania. The instrument has been revised and translated to Albanian. The country team has evaluated the sampling recommendations and made adjustments to the sampling frame to reflect local conditions and stakeholder participation. In addition, it has conducted 2 focus groups, similar to those conducted in Ecuador, in order to make the necessary adjustments to the measurement instrument.

The Albanian government is very supportive of this pilot initiative and institutional partners are participating in the process of implementing the survey pilot. The results of this experience will be utilized to prepare for a national survey, which in addition to look at the topics mentioned in the past section, will look at education, child labor, child discipline, and household characteristics.

### *Concluding Remarks*

At the research level, the main objective of this research program is to design a cross-national cross-cultural instrument that agrees on a common methodology, which can be supplemented with country-specific components. At the policy level, on the other hand, this survey program will facilitate the policy dialogue on root causes of migration and its effects providing interested stakeholders with precise information to develop coherent strategies at national and local levels to address the plight of children left-behind.

This work in progress responds to the felt need of policy makers and planners by providing them with ways of gauging what are some of the main constraints for families and left behind children in areas where migration tends to be predominant. At a long range, it is hoped that this effort could be useful to increase the dialogue among agencies, academics, and stakeholders in order to improve research methodologies and its implementation.

## *References*

- Batistella, G., & Gastardo-Conaco, M. C. G. (1998). The Impact of Labor Migration on the Children Left Behind: A Study of Elementary School Children in the Philippines. *SOJOURN*, 13(2), 220-241.
- Cortes, R. (2006). *Remittances and Children's Rights: An Overview of Academic and Policy Literature*. New York: Division of Policy and Planning - UNICEF.
- DESA Department of Economic and Social Affairs - Population Division. "International Migration Report 2002." In *Population Studies*, No. 220, 340. New York: United Nations 2003.
- Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People-CBCP /Apostleship of the Sea-Manila, Scalabrini Migration Center, & Overseas Workers Welfare Administration. (2004). *Hearts Apart: Migration in the Eyes of Filipino Children*. Manila: Scalabrini Migration Center.
- Groenewold, George, and Richard Bilborrow. "Design of Samples for International Migration Surveys: Methodological Considerations, Practical Constraints and Lessons Learned Form a Multi-Country Study in Africa and Europe." Paper presented at the Population Association of America General Conference, Boston, MA, 1-3 April 2004.
- Lohr, Sharon L. *Sampling: Design and Analysis*. Pacific Grove, CA: Duxbury Press, 1999.
- Schoorl, Jeannette, Liesbeth Heering, Ingrid Esveldt, George Groenewold, Rob van der Erf, Alinda Bosch, Helga de Valk, and Bart de Bruijn. "Push and Factors of International Migration: A Comparative Report." Luxembourg: Statistical Bureau of the European Commission (EUROSTAT) & Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NiDi) 2000.
- Whitehead, A., & Hashim, I. (2005). *Children and Migration*. Background Paper for DFID Migration Team. London, UK: Department for International Development.
- Yehoh, Brenda. S. A., & Lam, Theodora. (2006, 22-24 November). *The Costs of (IM) Mobility: Children Left Behind and Children who Migrate with a Parent*. Paper presented at the Regional Seminar on Strengthening the Capacity of National Machineries for Gender Equality to Shape Migration Policies and Protect Migrant Women, Bangkok.