

# THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION ON CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND

*United Nations Children's Fund*

## A. INTRODUCTION

International migration flows have increased substantially over the past decades. Today, about 3 per cent of the world population resides in a country other than where they were born (United Nations, 2002). Even though, proportionally speaking, this number is still small, international migration and its impact in receiving and sending societies is 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>1</sup> The main reason for the lack of research in this area is the scarcity of reliable country-level data on the incidence and magnitude of international migration (of adults or children) with a focus on those left behind. There is 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 to assess the positive and negative effects of migration. UNICEF, in collaboration with the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation of UNDP, 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, namely 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; third, it presents an overview of the progress made in the field so far; lastly, initial lessons learned and proposed next steps are presented.

## B. OVERVIEW OF THE SURVEY

The survey focuses on gauging the impact migration may have on the household, paying special attention to children left behind. The instrument is built upon the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) of the 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 labour among others. The instrument modules focus on health (non-disease-specific items to emphasize 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 household members living abroad (individually). Namely, the migration module collects information on:

1. Place of residence.
2. How and when the migrants left the country of origin for the first time (who paid for the trip,

who helped them to leave, how long it took to get to the place of residence, what kind of transportation was used, if the migrants were with or without documents, if the migrants moved with the help of a Government-sponsored programme).

3. Main occupation or type of job carried out before and after migrating.
4. Inventory of household goods 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 migrants first send money?
2. When was the last time that the migrants sent money, how often did the migrants send money, what methods did the migrants use to send money, and on average how much the migrants 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 family members get instructions on how to spend the money?
4. Who administers the money that household members send from abroad?
5. If the migrants send money for collective purposes and to whom?
6. If the person living abroad pays any expenses of those left behind?

### C. METHODOLOGY

In order to study the impact of international migration on a population that is inherently small in size, difficult to identify, and 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 household members have an international migration experience and households without such members.

A migrant household is defined as a household with children (0-17 years of age) in which at least one person who belongs to or is still considered a member of that household has moved to live in a foreign country. A non-migrant household is one with children (0-17 years of age) in which no members have ever moved away from the household.

There are various sampling strategies to estimate the prevalence of international migration and characteristics of interest. For the purpose of this study, the two-phase sampling strategy devised by the researchers at the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) and the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) was adopted (Groenewold and 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 their 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.

In order 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 and Bilborrow, 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 2007. 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.

#### D. FIELD PROGRESS AND INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS

After establishing institutional partnerships with the census offices in Ecuador (INEC), Albania (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 y Adolescencia, 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 discussed with local stakeholders and adjusted accordingly 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 under way.

The country team of UNICEF in Ecuador and partners conducted four 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 on their human rights.

The country team of UNICEF in Albania has evaluated the feasibility of adapting the Ecuadorian experience in Tirana, Albania, 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 into Albanian. The country team has evaluated the sampling recommendations and made adjustments to the sampling frame to reflect local conditions and stakeholders' participation. In addition, it has conducted two 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 looking at the topics mentioned in the past section, will address education, child labour, child discipline, and household characteristics.

## E. CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the research level, the main objective of this research programme 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, this survey programme 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 need of policymakers and planners by providing them with ways of gauging what are some of the main constraints for families and children left behind in areas where migration tends to be predominant. In the long run, it is the goal to stimulate the dialogue among agencies, academics, and stakeholders in order to improve research methodologies and their implementation.

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### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Some exceptions are the work by Battistella and Conaco (1998), Cortés (2007), Yeoh and Lam (2006) and the work sponsored by the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants as well as UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre.

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