

**FIFTH COORDINATION MEETING ON  
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Population Division  
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**UNICEF REPORT FOLLOWING THE HLD ON INTERNATIONAL  
MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Promoting the rights of children affected by  
Migration, with UN partners**

*United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)*

## 1. Overview and Introduction

Key policy and thematic issues in the field of international migration include, but are not limited to - child migration & migrant children; migration and trafficking; the gendered nature and feminization of migration; irregular migration; and migration and remittances. UNICEF recognizes that migration is a multi-dimensional issue that presents both opportunities and challenges. Strong national and global partnerships are required to ensure children's rights in this context; UNICEF is committed to such partnerships.

UNICEF is currently engaged in migration activities and policy initiatives with several UN partners (UNDP, UNDP Special Unit for South-South Co-operation, UN DESA, ILO, and UNHCR). In this work, UNICEF advocates for the increased visibility of children in the migration debate as well as gender and child-focused policy responses from the international community. The research and operational policy work on migration for 2006-2007 will prioritise issues related to the impact on children and adolescents left behind in countries of origin by remittance-sending parents when the parents migrate. Capacity building and knowledge exchange on migration issues affecting children, young people and women in countries of origin will contribute to the achievement of the MDGs and can support good governance and the protection of human rights.

Detailed information on UNICEF's work is provided in the sections below, preceded by background information on key migration policy issues, and UNICEF's involvement in these. This background provides the context for UNICEF's current work and focus in the field of migration, particularly our commitment to bring to light the issues affecting children in migration, particularly the impact on children-left-behind.

## 2. Background information

UNICEF has been involved in the preparation work leading up to the September 2006 HLD on International Migration and Development. UNICEF Executive Director Ms. Ann Veneman participated in the HLD Roundtable 2 *"Measures to ensure respect for and protection of the human rights of all migrants, and to prevent and combat smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons"* discussion on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2006.

The issue of children's rights has been overlooked global migration discussions and policy implementation initiatives. The HLD was seen as an opportunity to highlight children's welfare in international migration and development debates. Migration issues and challenges affecting children and youth must be seen in the broader context of widespread poverty and conflict. UNICEF has emphasized that discussions on how migration affects children need to consider the vulnerability as well as the resilience of children and young people.

**The President of the 61<sup>st</sup> UN General Assembly H.E. Sheika Haya Rashed Al Khalifa in the HLD closing statement on 15 September 2006, mentioned that the social impacts of migration on children need to be taken into account: *"Many of you have noted that some vulnerable groups, such as migrant women and children, need special protection"*. Furthermore the Round Table 2 chair stressed the need to uphold the protection of human rights (including**

children's and women rights). The chair for RT 2 noted that "of particular relevance was the protection of the rights and freedoms of groups that were more vulnerable to exploitation such as children, women and youth, indigenous people, persons with disabilities and migrants in irregular situations. Participating member-states reiterated that "human rights of migrants should be upheld" and they referred particularly to the primacy of social, economic and cultural rights.

In this context, UNICEF, together with UN partners, is working to gauge the specific economic and social impacts of migration on children-left-behind. Further, when children migrate with their parents they often encounter difficulties accessing higher education and health services in their host countries. In addition, migrant children often face language and cultural barriers. UNICEF is actively involved in protecting the rights of migrant children. More research and comparable global data is needed on how children are affected by migration so that issues affecting them can be more visible in migration debates and in the development of migration policies.

UNICEF is also very involved in protecting and assisting child victims of trafficking, and is a strong advocate of a human rights approach to the issue of child trafficking. UNICEF notes that the HLD roundtable on the protection of human rights of migrants, and to prevent and combat trafficking, advocated that governments must ratify and implement international legal standards, as well as develop bilateral agreements to facilitate cross-border co-operation.<sup>1</sup>

Gender sensitive approaches should also be taken into account in the development of an international migration agenda. Several organisations and UN-Agencies have highlighted the increasing feminization of migration. Female migrants in many ways are more vulnerable than male migrants and face a greater risk of exploitation, and are therefore in need of special protection measures. <sup>2</sup> UNFPA has focused on mainstreaming female migrants' needs and rights into the migration and development agenda. UNICEF advocates the importance of having a "life cycle approach to female migration" in migration discussions.

UNICEF believes that increasing synergies among UN partner agencies and other stakeholders that are part of the UN-GMG are crucial to improving the migration policies and ensuring that children affected by migration are healthy, educated, safe and able to enjoy their rights. To this end UNICEF has established partnerships with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), and UNDP's Special Unit for South-South Cooperation and offices in the field during the course of 2005-2006. By gathering evidence, analyzing and developing policies aimed at reaching families of migrants, and closely collaborating with governments and stakeholders, UNICEF is working to ensure that migrants and their families can access social services, wherever they may be. This transnational approach can help foster development in countries of origin.

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF and UN partners (including IOM) are working with member states and civil society groups to implement key UN human rights instruments regarding trafficking. UNICEF is engaged with member states (and partners) to address the increase in irregular migration, specifically looking into issues that "make people more vulnerable to fall prey to trafficking".

<sup>2</sup> See UNFPA/IOM publication titled "Women on the Move".

### 3. Key UNICEF Concerns

Children are affected by migration in different contexts; children under 18 years of age are affected in their survival, well-being and/or development when they are:

- Left behind by one or both migrating parents
- Migrating with their parents (children of migrants)
- Migrating alone
- Living in a context affected by migration

#### **Children must matter in migration policies and debates**

Migration generates development benefits. To maximize these benefits, the effects of migration on children – including the specific impacts of migration on children-left-behind – must be a core consideration in migration debates, where children have been regrettably invisible. More research and comparable global data is needed on how children are affected by migration so that children can be more visible in the setting of migration policies. Policies should be developed to maximise the development benefits of migration, minimise its negative impacts for children and promote children’s well-being.

#### **Children affected by migration are particularly vulnerable and should receive special protection**

Specifically, evidence based policies should seek to promote a child’s right to health, education and to be raised in a protective family environment and should protect children affected by migration from neglect and from falling into high risk behaviour. This implies migration policies that will support additional investments in health, education and social protection to mitigate the risks of exclusion and discrimination faced by migrant women and children left behind and to promote progress toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

#### **Children and households gain a significant resource from remittances, which are also an important development resource for nations in their efforts to attain the MDGs.**

In some cases, children’s health conditions and learning opportunities are improved by additional income from remittances. When remittances sent home by migrants are harnessed for development purposes, this should be done in a way that improves the well-being of children and communities at home. Remittances should complement Official Development Assistance (ODA), and strengthen, but not replace, government investment in domestic programs for social protection and poverty reduction.

#### **Women who stay behind as heads of households have special needs, as do the increasing numbers of women who migrate**

Gender sensitive migration policies are crucial. Indeed, children may be affected differently by an absent mother as compared to an absent father. Policies to promote children’s best interests should consider the effect of migration on different types of households.

#### **4. Research and Policy Analysis**

Remittances, which are often cited as one of the significant positive development outcomes of migration, provide economic benefits for migrants and their families. Thus, current research in this area is focused on how to maximize these benefits. At the same time, it is recognized that migration also comes with social costs (particularly the impact of parents' migration on the left behind families, especially children). There is a dearth of available data and research on the social impact of migration on children-left-behind; the psycho-social impacts of migration are even less understood. UNICEF advocates for more research and comparable global data on how children are affected by migration, with an emphasis on social and psychological factors and how these are linked to the well-being of children and society.

Another area of interest for UNICEF is in analyzing institutional capacity and policy frameworks (including institutional support) in different countries and regions of high migration. This will entail reviewing how these structures are addressing issues such as the protection of future migrants, the inclusion of Diaspora organizations in the development and migration dialogue, incorporating the voices of migrants, including women and children, and providing access to social services for families left behind. The key questions driving this area of research consider the extent to which existing institutions are including concerns about children affected by migration, and the institutional capacity needs of a country or region.

#### **5. Global Study on the Impact of Migration and Remittances on Children-Left-Behind**

Reliable national-level data about the incidence and magnitude of international migrant children, and specifically children left behind, are rare, in part because the physical act of migration makes it difficult to accurately collect information. The methodological challenges include data source problems and lack of comparable, reliable and valid survey instruments. In response to these challenges, UNICEF initiated a global study to explore the incidence, magnitude and impact of migration and remittances on children-left-behind.

The first phase of the study concentrated on developing a literature review on the impact of remittances on women and children (Report title - *Remittances and Children's Rights: An Overview of Academic and Policy Literature*).

The second phase, which is currently under way, is focused on the following outputs:

- Development of a survey instrument on migration to be incorporated into UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys as well as other UN household surveys;
- Sampling recommendations for implementation of a country-level migration survey; and
- A set of migration programme and policy guidelines for country offices.

UNICEF will work with UN DESA, UNDP, ILO and other main stakeholders in migration as well as migration data experts to address the impact of migration on children during 2007.

## 6. Partnerships

Partnerships are crucial for influencing migration policy, and filling migration data and information gaps. Each UN partner has expertise that can contribute to achieving a global framework of the determinants of migration, and their economic, governance and social dimensions, with particular emphasis on children and women.

UNICEF's collaboration with UNDP's Special Unit for South-South Co-operation includes the funding of a Global Study on the Financial and Social Impacts of Remittances and Migration on Children. This partnership has given the impetus to initiate policy work on the social impact of migration on women, children and young people in a number of countries in Latin America, Eastern Europe and Asia, and provided the scope to support inter-agency consultations and capacity-building seminars. This fruitful collaboration will continue during 2007.

Similarly, a memorandum of understanding was signed with IOM reflecting their shared commitments to children, and to develop a strengthened relationship in countries where both UNICEF and IOM have programmes of cooperation. UNICEF is also currently exploring how to co-operate with UNDESA to construct better quality data, disaggregated by age and gender. UNICEF is also investigating the feasibility and practicalities of fostering regional research networks both with UN partners and with other interested organisations .

Policy work and partnerships will also seek to make children more visible within national development policies and poverty initiative programs. More joint initiatives will be needed to ensure that young people in high out-migration communities and households access training opportunities for their future insertion in the domestic labor market. UNICEF will also work with other UN partners and stakeholders to ensure that vulnerable migrant children who may be prone to marginalization will indeed benefit from specific education and employment opportunities.

UNICEF is committed to working with others to foster "desirable living and working conditions for young people" in countries of origin so "that migration is truly a choice and not a necessity". This should include highlighting the issue of children's rights in the forum provided by the Global Migration Group. The GMG offers a unique opportunity for UNICEF to combine its resources and expertise with that of other agencies already involved in the promotion of the rights of migrants, thus bringing a strong and unified voice for children's rights into the migration debate.