

**SEVENTH COORDINATION MEETING ON  
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Population Division

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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**UNICEF'S POLICY AND PROGRAMME WORK ON  
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

*United Nations Children's Fund*

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

The 2006 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development recognized the contribution of international migration to the development of countries of origin and destination. Member States underscored the need for policy coherence and international cooperation in maximizing migration's benefits while reiterating the importance of safeguarding the human rights of all migrants and their families regardless of migration status. Participants noted the increased "feminization of migration" and called for migration policies that address inequalities, especially those arising from racial and gender discrimination, as well as from entrenched poverty. The High-level Dialogue also highlighted the need to address the serious problem of trafficking and smuggling of migrants, as well as the importance of focusing on the social consequences of international migration for receiving countries and families left behind in countries of origin.

## **B. UNICEF'S WORK ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) takes the position that the impact of migration on children, adolescents and women must be understood in the context of globalisation and transnational human mobility, as well as examined within the framework of poverty, gender, intergenerational issues and the protection of children's human rights (CRC/CEDAW). Migration is multi-threaded, revealing positive and negative scenarios, instances both of vulnerability and extraordinary resilience. Some of migration's effects can be captured by economic statistics, whereas social and cultural impacts are more difficult to assess, especially as they relate to women and girls.

Children are affected by migration at multiple levels: when they are left behind by one or both migrating parents, in migrating with parents (or born abroad), or when they migrate alone. In host countries, migrants and their families are often vulnerable to discrimination and social marginalization as well as poverty or economic distress, inadequate personal security, and challenges to their legal status. Migrant children are more prone to problems related to family separation and limited access to healthcare, adequate education and affordable housing.

Undocumented migrants, particularly children and women, are also more susceptible to human rights violations, including deprivation of liberty. In countries of origin, while remittances have helped in reducing the overall level of poverty and promote economic development, effects of parental absence have created new challenges for families and children left behind, including family instability, increased household burdens and social stigmatization. Studies also suggest that children and adolescents left behind may be at greater risk of psychosocial trauma, violent behaviour, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancy. Further, brain drain exacerbates the delivery and coverage of social services in the countries of origin.

As a member of the Global Migration Group (GMG), UNICEF has been collaborating with UN partners and IOM to increase the visibility of children and women's issues in international migration agendas. UNICEF upholds the platform of the GMG in promoting a gender-sensitive approach in assuring the human rights and wellbeing of children and adolescents affected by migration – namely, to provide worldwide and in-country leadership in promoting awareness and policy dialogue on migration-related issues; to facilitate global and country-level research and analysis; to identify critical issues, challenges, opportunities, and best practices; to reinforce and promote children's rights, with a focus on the protection and well-being of migrant children and children left behind.

UNICEF's policy research and analysis at the global, regional and country levels focuses on (a) the social impact of migration and remittances on children and women left behind in countries of origin; (b) the

migration of unaccompanied children; and (c) the situation of migrant children upon arrival at their destination. UNICEF is also promoting comparative analysis and statistical evidence to inform policy development and safeguard children and adolescent's rights in the context of migration. In partnership with governments, civil society and various transnational stakeholders, UNICEF is identifying good practices and lessons learned with which to address human rights and poverty-alleviation challenges linked to migration and its effects on children, adolescents and women in countries of origin, transit and destination.

## **C. UNICEF'S INITIATIVES TOWARDS FOLLOW-UP OF THE 2006 HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE**

### **1. *Policy research on the social impact of migration and remittances on children and women***

UNICEF is partnering with governments and civil society to ensure that children's well-being is viewed as a central concern of policy makers at the local, regional and global levels. It is intent on delivering sound, evidence-based research designed to clarify both the positive and negative effects of migration on children. This research serves as a platform for UNICEF's efforts, along with other UN agencies and international organizations, civil society groups on the ground, and governments, to develop actionable, gender-sensitive policies that secure the human rights of children affected by migration around the world.

With support from the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation (SU-SSC), UNICEF has carried out policy research and operational activities to assess the positive and negative impacts of migration and remittances on children and women left behind. This work is being carried out in partnership with governments, civil society and UNICEF offices in number of countries, including Albania, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Moldova, Morocco and The Philippines.

The policy research and operational work at country level deals with the impact of migration on the fulfilment of the rights of children and women through literature reviews, data collection and the assessment of lessons learned and best practices. Additionally, UNICEF is exploring the inter-linkages between migration, poverty reduction and development from a human rights-based, gender-sensitive perspective. This multidimensional approach encompasses the economic, social and legal effects of migration and remittances on the individual child, the family and on the sending community. A number of policy exchanges with national partners and civil society are contributing to a deeper understanding of these issues.

Preliminary findings of UNICEF's policy research are already contributing to an improved understanding of the social impact of migration on children and adolescents. UNICEF global policy research highlights that the human cost of migration and especially its impacts on families and children is often severe and may greatly exceed benefits accruing from remittances. Therefore, there is an urgent need to address such human costs via initiatives that build capacity within governmental and civil society institutions that address these issues in sending countries (de la Garza, 2008). Other UNICEF research is aimed at creating awareness of the need for holistic legal and policy frameworks and investment in order to assure the human rights of children and adolescents in at-risk communities.

UNICEF, in moving forward on the mandates of CRC/CEDAW, is also supporting capacity building and advocacy on the social protection and human rights dimensions of migration as it affects children and adolescents. This includes exchanges between policy makers, stakeholders and other partners in countries of origin, transit and destination (i.e. South-South exchanges). These policy activities have raised the profile of child migration issues at country and regional levels and have strengthened institutional support for sustainable human development and the protection of the rights of children affected by migration processes.

## ***2. Development of a survey instrument to assess the impact of migration and remittances on children left behind***

UNICEF has developed four modules within UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) to gauge the impact of international migration on migrant sending and non-migrant sending households. In this regard, UNICEF collaborated closely with ILO in developing the survey instrument and measurement tool. Pilot surveys have been conducted in Ecuador and Albania to test the validity of the modules. Data was collected on the characteristics, life satisfaction, health, and remittances of migrant households. Preliminary results from the pilot surveys suggest significant levels of internal consistency and reliability of the survey instrument. Along with UN partners and IOM, UNICEF is supporting the development of national surveys in several countries, including Albania and Morocco.

## ***3. Estimating the number of international migrant children***

Although some countries collect information in censuses on foreign-born members of the population, global estimates of the numbers of international migrant children are not available. To address this data gap, UNICEF has partnered with the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA) to develop a database that includes these estimates. The database will provide comparable global estimates of the numbers of international migrant children along with special tabulations by multiple age cohorts (0 – 18 years of age) and by gender. These estimates will be essential in understanding the patterns of the migration of children across the world and to formulate coherent policies regarding migrant children in receiving countries.

## ***4. Policy initiatives with the Global Migration Group***

UNICEF is working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Bank to develop a "Handbook on Mainstreaming Migration into Poverty Reduction and Development Strategies." As a practical tool, the Handbook aims to facilitate the efforts of policymakers in integrating migration into national and/or regional development agendas. The Handbook is expected to be available in April 2009.

Additionally, UNICEF has contributed to the GMG report on "International Migration and Human Rights." A joint initiative led by UNFPA, the report provides legal frameworks and key messages regarding the protection of the human rights of migrants, including child migrants. The report will be launched at the celebration for the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Additionally, UNICEF has contributed to the GMG report on "International Migration and Human Rights." A joint initiative led by UNFPA, the report provides legal frameworks and key messages regarding the protection of the human rights of migrants, including child migrants. The report will be launched at the celebration for the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. UNICEF also participated in the "International Conference on the Protection of the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration and the Human Rights of Children" – sponsored by the OHCHR and the government of Mexico. UNICEF along with other stakeholders stressed that policy must be shaped in accordance with human rights principles as well as the best interests of the child; it must be developed and implemented via effective inter-institutional coordination; and additionally, that an adequate legal framework is essential in protecting the rights of children affected by migration.

## ***5. Research and policy initiatives on the rights of children affected by migration***

UNICEF is examining the effects of migration on children from a human rights-based perspective. Within the framework of CRC, CEDAW, and other human rights instruments, UNICEF's research promotes the protection of the rights of child migrants and children left behind, as well the prevention of

child trafficking. This policy research and exchange of experiences among countries in the South will contribute to the strengthening of legal and institutional frameworks as well as supporting the efforts of governments and civil society in upholding legislative reform for the realisation of the rights of children affected by migration. This also includes working on protecting and respecting the human rights of migrant children, irrespective of their migration status as well as assessing deprivations and inequities (MDGs). In countries of transit and destination, UNICEF is collaborating with UN country team in South Africa and local authorities to address acts of racism, xenophobia, and other forms of related intolerance directed against migrants, particularly migrant children and adolescents. In this regard, information and awareness-raising campaigns are being promoted in various countries together with local partners, for instance in South Africa and Senegal.

#### **6. *'Independent child migration' between and within developing countries***

Children who migrate and live away from their parents or legal/customary adult guardians are often termed 'independent child migrants.' In seeking livelihoods and other rewards from migration, independent child migrants adopt many adult responsibilities. Although seemingly adult in purpose, they are children in terms of many of their individual attributes, their legal rights and status, and in terms of the social protections or restrictions that may apply to them. Research conducted by UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy explores the circumstances of such children in developing countries, and analyses the social and economic significance of their migration.

#### **7. *A statistical portrait of children in migrant families in selected OECD countries***

Migrant children in industrialised countries can experience substantial social exclusion, suggesting the need for more strongly inclusive policies and programmes. A UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre study, involving Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, UK, and the US, considers the situation of children in immigrant families of different origin based on data from census and population registers in areas such as language, civic participation, education, employment, poverty and housing. Through review of existing literature the initiative also takes stock of factors that may lead to the social exclusion of children in immigrant families.

#### **8. *Research and advocacy to fight trafficking of children and women***

According to UN estimates, over 2.5 million people have been trafficked for purposes such as forced labour, sexual exploitation, illegal adoption and the removal of organs. Many children and women leave their homes in search of a better life only to find themselves deceived or forced by traffickers to work in the sex industry. UNICEF and partners aim to expose the reality of human trafficking and to encourage legal and policy action as well as social mobilisation to prevent and address human rights violations.

UNICEF advocates for a protective environment where children are free from violence, exploitation, and unnecessary separation from family; and where laws, services, behaviours and practices minimize children's vulnerability, address known risk factors, and strengthen children's own resilience. This approach is human rights-based, and emphasizes prevention as well as the accountability of governments. At the country level, UNICEF's activities aim to prevent and respond to trafficking by supporting harmonization and reform of national legislation, strengthening institutional capacity and mechanisms for prevention, response and monitoring, promoting social change, providing services to families and communities, and supporting regional and cross-border cooperation with governments and civil society partners.

#### **D. EMERGING ISSUES**

UNICEF is currently engaged in monitoring major global developments as they relate to migration and its impact on the wellbeing of children – particularly in the context of sustainable human development and human rights. Such developments include the current worldwide financial crisis, which has the capacity to drastically disrupt remittance flows that are often essential to family wellbeing and in some instances support local economic activity. The global economic decline is likely to put pressure on countries of origin in terms of the provision of social services, and this may negatively affect the circumstances of children and families left behind. The loss of jobs by migrants in host countries may also lead to large scale return migration to certain countries. Some predict that the economic downturn may in some cases exacerbate discriminatory behaviour towards migrant populations. UNICEF, together with GMG partners is focused on assessing the possible consequences of the global financial crisis on children and adolescents affected by migration in developing countries.

Additionally, with support from the UNDP/Spain Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F), UNICEF, together with UN partners and IOM, has initiated programmes to address the issue of youth, employment and migration in several countries, including Albania, China and Paraguay. Recognizing that unemployment and under-employment are often push-factors in motivating young people to find opportunities in other countries, the programmes aim to (a) make youth employment a national priority in national development plans and frameworks; (b) develop and implement measures to help young people access the labour market, with an emphasis on disadvantaged and vulnerable youth; and (c) strengthen institutional capacity to effectively deliver youth employment interventions. UNICEF and partners take a multi-disciplinary policy approach in addressing challenges of migration and youth employment. The goal is to engage all key stakeholders in developing innovations and good practices at country level.

Furthermore, UNICEF is actively engaged in addressing the potentially serious consequences of climate change on migration processes and patterns. Population displacement involves many risks, and not only for those who undertake it but also for societies as a whole. There are potentially dire implications for children affected by environmentally-induced migration. Displacement can fragment families, disrupt social networks, interrupt children's education, reduce health care, increase vulnerability to communicable disease, chronic conditions and latent infections, and can expose children and adolescents to sexual violence. UNICEF is initiating a preliminary policy research investigating the extent to which migration caused by environmental degradation and climate change affects children and women. UNICEF looks forward to expanding this research and policy work with stakeholders and GMG partners.

# Migration Statistics on Children

## Context

At the beginning of the twenty first century, around three percent of the world population resides outside their country of citizenship. Although international migrants comprise a small fraction of the world population, international migration and its impact in receiving and sending countries is the subject of unprecedented attention at the policy level.

Within the migration and development discourse there are at least three main lines of reasoning. Some argue that migration stimulates development while others maintain that migration hinders development. Finally, there are those who argue that the impact of migration on development depends on the time dimension (short vs. long term) and the degree of development of sending and receiving countries.

None of these perspectives, however, takes into account the vulnerabilities and costs for migrants, their families, and their communities of origin beyond the economic impact (i.e. remittances) that migration has on sending and receiving communities. The main reason for the lack of research on the psycho-social impacts of migration on children has been the scarcity of reliable national-level data on the incidence and magnitude of international migration (of adults and children) and of those left behind.

## UNICEF Policy Research

Within this context, UNICEF initiated an ambitious research programme entitled *“The Social Impact of Migration and Remittances on Children’s Rights and Well-being: The Challenges and Opportunities for the MDGs – A Policy Initiative.”* This policy research was aimed at increasing knowledge about the economic and social effects of migration on sending and receiving communities by collecting data on the incidence and magnitude of international migrant children and on children left behind. UNICEF’s research is comprised of the following two components:

### 1. *Estimating the Number of International Migrant Children*

In partnership with UN/DESA, UNICEF is building a comprehensive database to estimate the number of international migrant children. Current international migration statistics does not disaggregate the data by age cohort so currently there are no official data that allow policy makers to formulate coherent policy recommendations for enhancing children’s welfare in receiving countries.

This database will provide comparable global estimates of the numbers of international migrant children. With this information, along with special tabulations by multiple age cohorts (0 – 18 years of age) and by gender, UNICEF will be able to make children more visible in migration debates and policies.

### 2. *The Impact of International Migration on the Left-Behind*

In collaboration with the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation of UNDP, UNICEF initiated policy research and pilot survey work on the impact of migration on the left-behind in Ecuador and Albania in order to formulate a common methodology for gathering reliable data that captures both the positive and negative effects of migration on children left-behind.

Results of this initiative will not only allow policy makers to estimate the numbers of children left-behind, but they will also provide them with a cross-national, cross-cultural methodology to be used in conjunction with UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). Moreover, findings from this research will facilitate the policy dialogue on the impact of international migration on the material as well as immaterial impacts (e.g. quality of life) of migration on children left behind. Interested stakeholders will have far more exact and detailed information with which to develop strategies at the local and national levels that address the plight of children left-behind.

## **Component 1: Estimating the Number of International Migrant Children**

The scarcity of reliable national-level data on international migration has motivated UNICEF to establish a partnership with UN/DESA to estimate the incidence and magnitude of child migration internationally. At the operational level, this initiative continues to benefit from a fruitful collaboration with the World Bank and the University of Sussex, primarily through the contribution of data.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection is a vital part of the project, ensuring that the maximum amount of empirical data is taken into account when estimating the number of international migrant children. In the past few months, hundreds of new tabulations have been added to the database. In total, the database contains now more than 3,600 different tabulations on the international migrant population, by gender, age and country of origin. Roughly one-third of these tables have information by age and gender.

### **Data Verification**

A key aspect of the project is verification of the empirical data collected. Data verification entails multiple processes. First, the data points entered into the database should be the same as those found in official publications and reports. Second, a comparison of different data sources for specific countries and time frames will result in validating some data sources and rejecting others. Similarly, an analysis of time series (also for specific countries) will be made. Checks that have so far been carried out include verifying the accuracy of totals by sex, age and country of origin. Particular attention was devoted to verifying the census dates reported in the database. The exact census dates will be important for harmonizing reference points for all data to mid-year.

### **Data Harmonization**

A key objective of the initiative is to harmonize international migration data reported by different

countries. However, this is a significant challenge, considering that countries use a wide variety of definitions and reporting formats. Some initial steps to harmonize the data were taken during the reporting process. In particular, considerable time was devoted to improve coding consistency for international migrant countries of origin.

### **Estimation Process**

Estimating the number of international migrant children depends on accurate estimates of the total number of international migrants. Currently, the Population Division is undertaking the revision of the 2005 estimates. This revised assessment will serve as the baseline from which to estimate the number of international migrant children and will ensure a correspondence between both sets of estimates. Considerable progress has been made in the revision of the 2005 data sets. As a first step, an “input table” was created, containing all the empirical data from the database that will be used in the estimation process. This “input table” was compared with that for the previous round of revision, with the 2005 estimates as well as with preliminary 2008 estimates.

### **Global Migration Research Database (GMRD)**

In view of the unprecedented demand for accurate, up-to-date and policy-relevant data on international migration, the Population Division has developed a password-protected, web-based interface with which to access information contained in the database. During the test phase, access will be provided to key partners within and outside the United Nations.

It is important to note that estimating the number of international migrant children only tells half the story. In order to formulate coherent policy recommendations that enhance children’s welfare, it is necessary to also estimate the numbers and prevalence of children left-behind. Only then can the full picture of the positive and negative effects of migration be realized.

## **Component 2: The Impact of International Migration on the Left-behind**

UNICEF pilot surveys implemented in Ecuador and Albania constitute the first efforts to measure the number of children left-behind. Also, in gathering quantitative and qualitative data on the impact of migration on these children's well-being, we have made important strides in comprehensively assessing the impact of migration on sending-country households, particularly on children left behind.

An important feature of the instrument used in these measurement efforts is that it is grounded in UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) methodological scaffolding, and hones in on international migration's material and psycho-social impact on the left-behind. This instrument and the methodology it espouses complement traditional MICS modules focusing on other important issues (such as education, child discipline, household characteristics and child labour, among others), and serve to broaden MICS's scope and richness.

### **Survey Topics**

The pilot modules tested in Ecuador and Albania, devote specific attention to health (non-disease-specific, in order to assess health-related quality of life), life satisfaction, migratory processes and remittances. These modules will provide added versatility to MICS, thereby allowing researchers to leverage a wide variety of modules (in multiple combinations) as desired, to suit their specific research agendas.

The health module provides a basic measure of health-related quality of life for clinical and economic appraisals. This module combines five dimensions (mobility, self-care, general activity, pain/discomfort, and anxiety/depression), allowing the formulation of a single profile and a single index value for non-disease-specific health status.

The life satisfaction modules centre on gauging individuals' perception of well-being based on his or her values and life priorities. This module will supply information beyond traditional economic and/or

material indicators, providing researchers and policy makers with a more complete picture of the impact of migration on those left behind.

The migration and remittances modules use proxy respondents to gather general information regarding each household member living abroad. These modules collect information on place of residence, the migratory process (how and when they left their country of origin, time-frames for travel, etc), on primary occupation before and after migrating, as well as some data on general (material) characteristics of the household prior to migration. In addition, the international migration module provides information on patterns of communication between migrants and those left behind. The international remittances module focuses on collecting information on migrants' remitting behaviour (frequency of remittances, how they send money, average amount remitted) as well as on the purposes and uses of remittances.

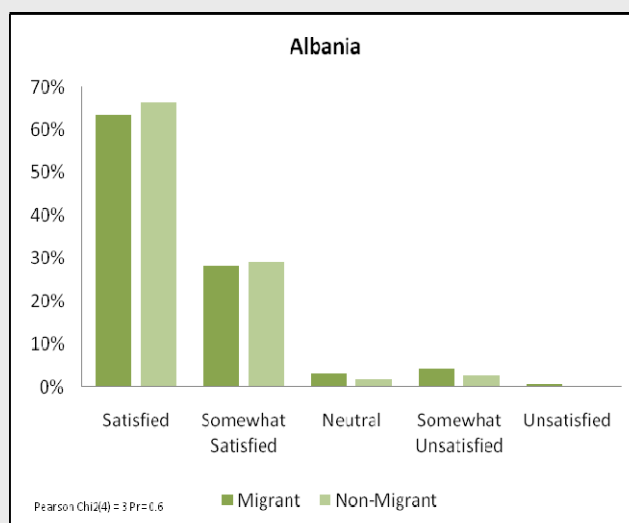
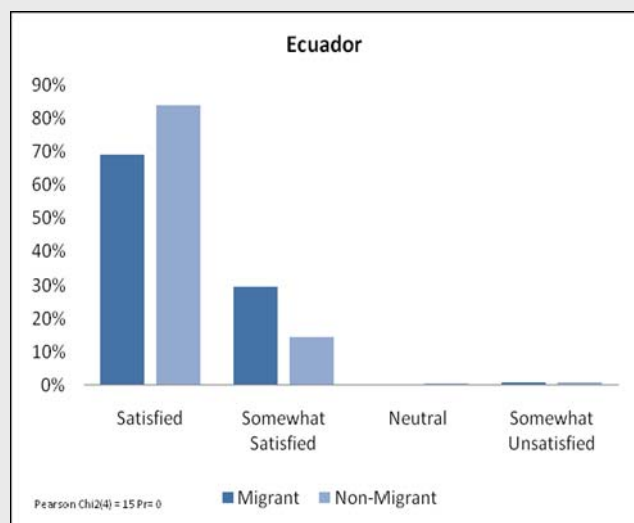
### **The Ecuadorian and Albanian Experiences**

In partnership with Ecuador's (INEC) and Albania's (INSTAT) census offices, and with other interested stakeholders, qualitative and quantitative field work at the country level has been finalized. In both Ecuador and Albania a series of focus groups with children and adults of migrant and non-migrant households were conducted.

As a result of this work, the survey instrument was upgraded, thereby improving its validity. In Ecuador and Albania, adults from non-migrant households were virtually unanimous in stating that the family unit, in its totality, tends to be most affected. Marriage bonds are also frequently affected by migration, to the extent that migrants sometimes establish new emotional ties abroad, often at the expense of their interaction with families back at home. At the same time, members of migrant households, including caretakers, reported high levels of stress deriving from added responsibility assumed in overseeing the well-being of nephews or grandsons left under their supervision.

## Preliminary Results of the Pilot Surveys in Ecuador and Albania

The following graphs illustrate the impact that migration has on child life-satisfaction for children of migrant and non-migrant households. Overall, the results of the pilot survey in Ecuador suggest that migration, on average, has significant impacts on child life-satisfaction. On the other hand, in Albania, the data suggest that children from migrant households seem to be less satisfied; however the differences are not statistically significant. The pilot study's small sample size was not sufficient to extrapolate general findings for the overall population. Yet the hints of significant patterns are recognizable and justify further research in the hope that definitive conclusions – with major implications for policy – may be drawn.



### Preliminary Results

In Ecuador, nearly equal numbers of the focus group's participants recognized that migration has both positive and negative impacts. Children between and 10 years of age were more inclined to point to the positive impacts of migration than dwell on its negative impacts. By contrast, older participants were more likely to reference migration's negative impacts than its positive impacts.

The positive impacts of migration were linked to the material benefits resulting from remittances. As with their Ecuadorian counterparts, children in Albania between the ages of 8 and 12 were more likely to highlight the positive economic aspects of migration than its negative impacts. Although older participants mainly highlighted migration's economic benefits, they were more specific in describing its negative impacts on the left-behind.

### Next Steps

These methodological results, which are being validated by a group of experts on the subject, point to the need to assess migration's material and psycho-social impacts on the left-behind among migrant families – as compared to conditions in non-migrant households. Thus far, there is substantial evidence to suggest that the impact of international migration extends beyond purely material impacts.

UNICEF's current research is focusing on expanding its methodological work in order to produce into more substantive data. UNICEF is also working with the Global Migration Group (GMG) in bringing together government partners and stakeholders to address the gaps in information and paucity of data on the effects of international migration on children and adolescents.