Summary report

Effects of migration on children of Uzbekistan

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Background

Labor migration from Uzbekistan has become a life strategy for millions of people since the country gained its independence. Factors such as ethnic, political, social, gender considerations and expectations about improving the quality of life in the home country remain driving factors behind this phenomenon. According to official statistics from the Republic of Uzbekistan, the unemployment rate in the country was 9.2 per cent in the first half of 2019.

In Uzbekistan, children left behind often stay with their extended family members, with adult relatives acting as caregivers, when one or both parents migrate. Such children may face developmental, psychosocial and emotional challenges, since the absence of parents creates disruptions and displacement in care giving arrangements. Parental migration has detrimental effects on the education, health and social status of children as well. It can lead to early adulting of the child due to increased household duties and responsibilities which can affect eating habits, academic performance and cause depression.

In December 2018, UNICEF in partnership with the larger EU-funded cross-regional project ‘Protecting children affected by migration in Southeast, South and Central Asia’ has initiated a study on ‘Effects of migration on children of Uzbekistan’ in 4 regions of the country (both urban and rural settings): Bukhara, Fergana, Khorezm, and Surkhandarya, to examine how labor migration affects the overall development of children left behind by looking at changes in a multidimensional context. The study aimed to understand the effects of parental migration on children left behind and to find out if the extended absence of one or both parents resulted in lower educational attainment, decreased development and diminished psychosocial well-being among children left behind.

In accordance with the 2018 assessment of child protection system in Uzbekistan, although components of a child protection system exist in the country at institutional level, they are not functioning effectively due to human resource gaps, insufficient funding and weak inter-agency coordination. Child protection services target mostly one category of children—those deprived of parental care—who are basically placed in residential care institutions. Services and interventions for prevention and response to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation are underdeveloped. The social work as a profession is not well developed and such services are mostly provided only in residential care institutions.

Uzbekistan currently invests 9.7 per cent of GDP in its national social protection system which is financed by a combination of social insurance contributions and general tax revenues. As in high-income countries, Uzbekistan has built a national lifecycle social protection system, with schemes addressing the challenges faced by people across the lifecycle, from childhood to old age. Uzbekistan’s child benefit system comprises three main schemes: the Childcare Allowance for families with a child under the age of 2 years; the Family Allowance for families with children aged 2-14 years; and, a Child Disability Benefit. Although Uzbekistan is one of the largest investors in social protection across middle income countries, the design of its system is not aligned to the challenges faced by the country. Only 17 per cent of children can access the child benefit system due to low investment and low coverage. Many recipients of the Childcare and Family Allowances only receive the benefits for short periods of time.


Methodology

This study was based on a mixed-method approach that combined quantitative and qualitative data collection, including surveys with 1016 adult caregivers and 702 children (aged 11-17) from migrant households with 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) with caregivers, children (aged 15-17) and services providers, and 16 key informant interviews (KII) conducted with various stakeholders. The data collection was implemented by “Al Mar Consulting” a local consultancy agency, between March 2019 and May 2019.

The total sample size for the study was 1,016 households/caregivers that fit the following criteria:

- There is at least one child under the age of 18 in the household.
- At least one parent of the child/children is currently abroad as labour migrant.
- A parent of the child/children returned from migration within the last three months.

During the data collection, all UNICEF prescribed ethical considerations were integrated into research activities. Signed informed consent forms were obtained from caregivers before conducting interviews with them and their children during all stages of data collection to ensure child protection, privacy and confidentiality.

Parental migration does not ensure the realization of children's rights to social protection, quality education, parental guidance, and participation in society. The recognition of the social impacts of migration is an important step towards adopting evidence-based policies and programmes to mitigate the negative impacts of parental migration on families with children left behind. In this sense, migration cannot safeguard children's rights for protection, education, participation in society and independent decision making as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC, 1989).
EFFECTS OF MIGRATION ON CHILDREN OF UZBEKISTAN

Findings

- The major driver for migration from Uzbekistan is not the lack of jobs in the country, but rather low-income levels that are not enough to afford an acceptable standard of living. Most of the respondents in this study (80 per cent) come from rural areas.

- Most of migrant workers from Uzbekistan (87 per cent) migrate to Russia, with most people staying there for more than 9 months. Uzbek migrants also chose South Korea, Turkey and Kazakhstan as destinations to find employment.

- Most migrant workers from Uzbekistan tend to work in lower-paid jobs in the countries of destination. Most of them do not have higher education. The majority (40 per cent) work in construction, 20 per cent in production industry and the rest (40 per cent) work in restaurants, cleaning, transportation, production and retail industries.

- In many migrant households (45 per cent) at least two children are left behind. Almost 63 per cent of such children live with a mother, since migrant fathers seem to earn more and send larger remittances to their families.

- Family members, especially mothers often migrate leaving children of any age behind, even those at the age of 0-6, which is an essential age for early childhood development and the establishment of the parental-child relationship.

- Less than half of children of migrants (37 per cent) live in kinship care. These children report, that caregivers use different method of upbringing and control: 12 per cent of children experienced the loss of privileges, three per cent were called dumb, lazy or another name and 8 per cent got shouted, yelled, or screamed at.

“For the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, a child should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding”

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
**Findings**

- Most of the household ratio (84 per cent) dependent on remittances as it helps pay for health and education, better nutrition, and better housing. Half of migrant’s households have expenditure exceeding income and debt. Many families do not have other sources of stable income and half of them were reported unemployed.

- Families of migrant workers tend to live in poor conditions. Only 19 per cent of studied households have central heating and only half of the households have access to running water.

- Almost all surveyed caregivers (93 per cent) stated that other types of expenses (e.g. study materials for children, clothing and medication) are often not affordable for households with children left behind.

*Figure 2: Main items of expenditure, by type of the area (per cent)*

Source: Caregivers (N valid cases = 1016).

- Children left behind in surveyed migrant households usually do not experience problems with their nutrition and have a well-balanced diet, though their food intake might not always consist of hot meals. Daily diet of children includes fruits, vegetables, meat and dairy products.

- Three per cent of families, experience food shortages and usually these are the ones that do not have other sources of income than remittances. The cause for food shortages can be related to the frequency and regularity of financial transfers by family members in migration.

- Children coming from low income families, who do not have enough money to afford paid school lunches, receive support from schools, who are supplied with locally grown food by farmers.

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Shoira returned to Termez to take her son back from the Center. “We did not have a place to stay. I did not have any job. None of my relatives helped me. I wanted to be with my son but couldn’t meet his basic needs. For two months we lived in the cemetery where my mother is buried,” she cannot stop her tears rolling down. After that, Shoira had to take the difficult decision of leaving Ahadjon in a ‘Mehribonlik’ home.

*Read a story of Shoira*
• Most households have access to health services. Only three per cent do not have regular access to healthcare due to the lack of good quality health services in different parts of the country.

• Not all migrant households participated in the study, can afford necessary medication or vaccines due to the low income of these families and the generally high cost of medicine.

• Around 14 per cent of babies in the study below the age of 1 were not vaccinated within the last 12 months. This can be related to the lack of knowledge by caregivers about the mandatory vaccines or the lack of access to immunization centers as well as the high cost of vaccines not covered by State funding (e.g. Hepatitis A vaccine).

• High costs of preschools pose a barrier to enrollment for one in four families in Uzbekistan. There is lack of available quality pre-school education equally across the country (almost none in rural areas). Preschool education is important to every child to get academic preparation and a nurturing environment where they can play while their parents are working.

• Children often experience educational dissatisfaction due to poor school equipment, poor teaching and shortage of teachers and a lack of activities and social support at schools even when children do have time to study.

• Half of children attend extracurricular activities to supplement knowledge at school/college. Engagement of children into extracurricular activities

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improves school performance even after an extended parental absence and can help offset the negative effects of parental migration on children's mood.

- Children left behind get support with home tasks and studies when needed and caregivers keep control of educational performance of children through regular communication with teachers. Only 23 per cent of children attend tutors and receive extra lessons.

«When a child is bored and no longer interested in learning, his school performance drops a lot. Some children admit that they have to take their studies more seriously and do less work about the house only when their parents return»

- FGD with children

Figure 6: Did the child/children of migrant relative(s) stop going to school/college during the year. Answers of 1016 for 1391 children

- There are no serious problem of absenteeism or school dropout among children left behind covered by this study as 98 per cent of surveyed children attend school.

- About 8 per cent of all children in the study attending school or college missed classes for 1 month or less over the last year due to health issues, sport competitions or visiting relatives. Material difficulties were also reported as the reasons disrupting school attendance (e.g., lack of clothes for different seasons, school supplies, etc.).

A couple from Termez left for another country, leaving children behind with their grandmother. The grandmother could not manage meeting some needs of her 15-year-old granddaughter. Mukhlisa made friends who were much older. They offered her to live with them and earn some money. She started missing school and soon left her home.

Read a story of Mukhlisa

- Many children expressed the need to continue education in order not to repeat the life choices of their parents.
“The youth should have opportunities to pursue higher education and concentrate on their studies. This means they would have different priorities and would not end up as labor migrants like their parents”

- FGD, female, children, urban, Fergana.

Parental migration impacts negatively on children’s emotional well-being. Around 33 per cent experience unhappiness and 21 per cent have anxiety.

Half of children report worsened mood immediately after parent(s) migrated.

Some of the surveyed children (33 per cent) reported having more duties such as working on a family farm, babysitting, and doing other work around the house, which had previously been done by their parents. The increase in house duties affects children’s mood in a negative way.

When I was in the 7th grade, my grandma passed away. Last year I lost my grandfather too. So, we were almost alone. There is only my uncle, my mom’s brother. He is 30 and he too wants to leave for Korea to get a job. The household chores are now on my shoulders. I clean, cook, wash and take care of my brother.

Read a story of Soliha

Almost half of children (44 per cent) mainly share their emotions with mothers. They claim that caregivers do not understand them as much as their parents do since they know their personalities better.
For the past five years, Behbud has been living with his grandparents. It took him a while to adjust to the absence of his mother. Behbud is a very quiet boy, who doesn’t like to speak a lot, but his eyes tell a story. It’s the story of a child who has learned not to look for his mother for comfort when he is hurt or unhappy. Instead, he must let his feelings out in secret. “I don’t want my grandma or grandpa to see my tears,” he says. He does cry sometimes, when he misses his mom: “I want my mom to return and never leave me again."

Read a story of Behbud

**Figure 8:** Frequency of diverse types of “losing temper” by kids, assessed by caregiver (per cent)

- Break the rules: 8%
- Gets into fights: 6%
- Rude to adults: 18%
- Displays anger on to siblings/other children: 37%
- Leavers home: 1%
- Turns into himself/herself: 13%
- Other: 17%

- About half of caregivers claim that young children often become stubborn, whimsical, capricious, and naughty especially when they miss their parents. Around 37 per cent express their anger on siblings and 18 per cent are being rude to adults.
- Most caregivers (74 per cent) say that children are reticent with others.
- About 7 per cent of children report experiencing physical punishments by caregivers, which increases the chances of having lowered mood when parents leave. Violence hinders the development of children, reduces both the ability to learn and school performance, provokes low self-esteem, emotional distress and depression, and sometimes leads to risky behaviour and the risk of self-harm.
- The FGD also revealed that emotional problems of the child can grow, and the very extreme consequence of the absence of support and help, can be a suicide attempt.

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**Findings**

“The physical presence of parents is the major factor in maintaining attachment relationships with children. Their prolonged absence may take an emotional toll on the children left behind, impacting on their psychological wellbeing”

- Maziyar Taleshi, child protection expert at UNICEF

- Though overall statistics show the occurrence of early marriages in Uzbekistan (Table 1) and the Government is taking measures in this regard, the study revealed no early marriages or any preferences to early marriages. Both caregivers and children largely report the preferable age for marriages for both girls and boys to be within the age range of 21-26. In urban areas, caregivers choose older ages for children as appropriate than they do in rural areas.
Table 1: Early marriages among girls and boys under 18 in Uzbekistan in 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Uzbekistan</td>
<td>4786</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Karakalpakstan</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andijan region</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bukhara region</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jizzakh region</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kashkadarya region</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navoi region</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Namangan region</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khoresm region</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tashkent city</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Many families do not have access to social support and allowances for low-income families in Uzbekistan due to the lack of information and awareness about the possibilities or difficulties in proving the need and eligibility for such support. Only 28 per cent of caregivers are aware of social services for children and only 19 per cent received social support from various services.

Figure 10: Awareness of social services, caregivers. Q93- Do you know of the following social services in relation to children and family? (per cent)
Implications

Generally, more families believe that the positive impacts of migration greatly outweigh the negative ones. The remittances sent back by family members working abroad can reduce the economic vulnerability of families left behind. The study reveals that with the help of financial transfers families can afford better living conditions, educational materials, health care, etc.

However, it is not yet confirmed whether the remittances are sufficient to address the families' needs in full, especially those related to children's psychological well-being. Because of parental migration, children left behind may suffer the consequences of family disruption, receive insufficient care and face the risk of being institutionalized. This can especially affect children's psychological and emotional health. In some cases, children may also find themselves responsible for tasks normally completed by adults such as taking care of siblings, housework, and agricultural work, which can interfere with children's education and leisure activities. In particular, the study has identified three important potential negative impacts on children:

Impact on children's care arrangements. This study revealed that most of the migrant workers from Uzbekistan do have children but prefer travelling alone, leaving children in the care of the other parent or extended family, or in some cases placing them into institutional care. When fathers migrate, mothers are usually the primary caregivers of children. Kinship care is the most common arrangement for children when both parents migrate. In many cases, kinship care will be a safe and stable environment for children. However, such the arrangements are not formalised and registered with statutory bodies and in other cases, particularly where there are economic challenges for the kinship carer, children are at risk of neglect, exploitation and abuse.

Impact on children's psychological well-being. Regardless of the household situation, most children miss their parents when they are away. Parental migration seems to take the greatest toll on children’s emotional well-being, the study results reveal. The study found some support for the links between a father’s migration and lower levels of children's emotional well-being: when children live without fathers, more of them report worsened mood, losing their tempers and feeling sad. Also, emotional well-being decreases with the increase of duration of parental absence, and in families with lower income. When children miss their parents, they tend to have higher stress levels, mood fluctuations and behaviour change, which in turn negatively affects other aspects of children's psychological well-being.

Impact on children's protection and well-being. In cases where a child and household are abandoned by the migrant, children’s protection and well-being can be severely compromised in a variety of ways. Our analysis demonstrates that caregivers tend to use different methods of child rearing and control. About 7 per cent of children experience physical punishments, three per cent of children were hurt at home, and 6 per cent of children at school.

One third of children must take additional responsibilities since migration of parents and this is mainly related to housework, babysitting and taking care of siblings. Children themselves do not consider this extra work as a problem that interferes with their studies or other aspects of life. However, the analysis demonstrates that increase in house duties does affect children's mood in a negative way.
Recommendations

1. Encourage families with children left behind to formalise care by the extended family. Some of the measures that can help nudge the population include:
   - Organising awareness raising and education campaigns among families and communities on the benefits of formal guardianship and negative consequences of the lack of it
   - Providing support to caregivers during the registration process and document collection
   - Simplifying procedures for the formalisation of guardianship
   - Providing legal support and consultations

2. Encourage the Government of Uzbekistan to fund more national large-scale studies to understand the scope and consequences of labour migration for children and families. For example, specific focus should be paid to children left behind who are placed in institutional care and children affected by migration who became victims of violence and abuse.

3. Improve the system of social protection in Uzbekistan at the national and regional level, by allocating more adequate resources to support programmes for low-income families and improving the monitoring mechanisms tracing the impact of such programmes.

4. Inform people about employment opportunities in their own country/community before they decide to migrate. The number of domestic factories, and farm and non-farm enterprises, is increasing – as is the demand for labor inside the country, but people are not always informed about the opportunities or do not have enough skills. The information about available positions should be better delivered and vocational training could be organized for people who are considering migration, especially for women with children.

5. Improve the overall coverage of healthcare services across Uzbekistan, providing better outreach for families located in remote areas. Mobile medical units and health training of community members in each area could be a solution. Include Hepatitis A vaccine into the mandatory vaccination calendar plan and make it free of charge for all children (conduct a broader research on vaccination for a detailed data).

6. Improve the coverage of pre-school services for children from 0 to 6 years old across the regions to increase mothers’ employment opportunities and provide subsidies to low-income families to access private services and obtain required vaccines.

7. Provide diversity, affordability and access of non-formal education programmes across Uzbekistan, with well-trained professionals and consistent links with schools. This support must be age-sensitive, and tailored to the needs of young children, who are affected by parental migration to the greatest extent.

8. Provide additional support and guidance to migrant households in managing their daily errands, so that no extra housework falls on the shoulders of children, which can deprive them from opportunities to take part in non-formal learning.

9. It is key to design a clear system of identification, assessment, and referral to social services for children at risk at schools and mahallas (including children in migrant households). General education campaigns should be organised in communities in the topic of positive child rearing in mahallas (i.e., effective, nonviolent discipline techniques, encouragement and successful communication skills).

10. Since migration has the biggest toll on children’s emotional well-being it is crucial to develop and expand professional psychosocial support services for children affected by migration in schools, colleges and local communities. Psychologists working in schools should be provided with additional training in how to work with a particular target group, such as migrants’ children. A psychological hotline could be useful for both caregivers and children in migrant households. Comprehensive programmes and strategies on anti-bullying and ensuring safe learning environments in schools are needed.
The European Union is made up of 28 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, since the entry into force in 1958 of the Treaty of Rome which founded the European Economic Community, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

The Women’s Committee of Uzbekistan provides support to women in protecting their rights and enhancing their involvement in public and political life of the country. Since 1991, the committee has been working to address such issues as providing assistance to women with disabilities, socially disadvantaged women, crime prevention and social rehabilitation and adaptation of formerly incarcerated women. Other activities include employment support, improving working conditions and wide engagement of women and girls, especially in rural areas, in family entrepreneurship and craftsmanship.

UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere.

UNICEF is committed to doing all it can to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in partnership with governments, civil society, business, academia and the United Nations family – and especially children and young people.