

Increasing the Visibility of Children in Migration Debate: Key UNICEF Messages

Children must matter in migration policies and debates. Migration generates development benefits. To maximize these benefits, the effects of migration on children must be a core consideration in migration debates, where children have been woefully invisible. Children are affected by migration when they are left behind by one or both migrating parents, migrating with their parents, migrating alone, or living in a context affected by high migration. Policies should protect children's rights by enhancing access to the potential benefits created by migration, while also protecting against inherent vulnerabilities.

Children affected by migration are particularly vulnerable and should receive special protection. Migration policies should be accompanied by additional investments in health, education and social protection to address the risks, exclusion and discrimination faced by children and adolescents who are migrating or are left behind. When children migrate with their parents, the benefits of access to higher standards of education and health may also be reduced by hostilities, relative poverty and language barriers.

Children and households gain a significant resource from remittances, which are also an important development resource for nations in their efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In some cases, children's health conditions and learning opportunities are improved by additional remittance income. When remittances that migrants send home are harnessed for development, this should be done in a way that improves the well-being of the children and communities at home. Remittances should supplement ODA, and build on but not replace government investment in domestic programmes 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 imperative. Children may also 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.

More research and comparable global data is needed on how children are affected by migration, so that children can be more visible in migration debates and in the setting of migration policies. In line with the purpose of the High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, policies should be developed to maximize the development benefits of migration, minimize its negative impacts for children and promote children's well-being. 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 falling into high-risk behaviors and from suffering as a result of discrimination, social exclusion, exploitation, neglect, or limited parental care.