

**Innocenti Working Paper**  
**2005-05**

**CHILDREN OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS IN  
INDONESIA, THAILAND, AND THE PHILIPPINES:  
A REVIEW OF EVIDENCE AND POLICIES**

**John Bryant**

**April 2005**

**UNICEF**  
**Innocenti Research Centre**

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**For every child**  
**Health, Education, Equality, Protection**  
**ADVANCE HUMANITY**



## Innocenti Working Papers

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The Terms of Reference and funding for this study was provided through the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office. The aim was to review literature with particular attention to available quantitative information on migration in selected countries of the region. The analysis was elaborated in consultation with the Innocenti Research Centre, as a contribution to a wider understanding of the situations of children of migrants and children who migrate.

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## Innocenti Working Paper 2005-05

### Children of International Migrants in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines: A Review of Evidence and Policies

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**Summary:** This paper considers three groups of children affected by international migration: (i) children left behind by international labour migrants from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand; (ii) children of Thai nationals in Japan; and (iii) children brought along by irregular migrants in Malaysia and Thailand. Based on the limited data available from published sources, the paper constructs preliminary estimates of numbers of children involved. It then synthesizes available evidence on problems and opportunities faced by the children, and on policies towards them. There are, however, important gaps in the available evidence. The paper identifies these gaps, and suggests ways in which they might be filled. The paper also makes policy recommendations.

The growth of international migration in Southeast Asia has affected significant numbers of children. Some necessarily crude calculations suggest that 3-6 million children have been left behind by Filipino parents working overseas; the equivalent figure for Indonesia is something like one million, and for Thailand half a million. These numbers imply that roughly 10-20 per cent of Filipino children, and 2-3 per cent of Indonesian and Thai children, have a parent overseas.

Based on good evidence from the Philippines, and scattered evidence from Indonesia and Thailand, it appears that (i) migration of parents improves the material conditions of the children left behind, which probably flows through to children's health and schooling, and (ii) the social costs are strongly mitigated by the involvement of the extended family. In the Philippines, but less so in Indonesia and Thailand, governmental and non-governmental organizations already provide a range of services for children and migrants.

Meanwhile, in Thailand, there are over 100,000 children of undocumented migrants from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos. There are tens or perhaps hundreds of thousands of children of Indonesian migrants in Malaysia. Scattered evidence suggests that these children face much greater difficulties than the children left at home by Filipino, Indonesian, and Thai workers. The children brought along to Thailand and Malaysia appear to be significantly poorer than other children in their host countries, and to have limited access to social services. In Thailand, however, current efforts to register foreign workers and their dependants may lead to improved access, at least in the short term.

A number of practical, low-cost policies to address the problems of children left behind by labour migrants from Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines have been suggested or implemented. If further research were to show that particular subgroups, such as those with both parents overseas, suffered special disadvantages, then high-cost interventions for these subgroups might be justified. However, more general high-cost interventions covering all children left behind by labour migrants are not justified on current evidence, since this

evidence suggests that children do not appear, on average, to face greater difficulties than other children in the same societies.

Attention should instead be focused on children brought along by undocumented migrants. Thailand's current registration campaigns represent a major policy experiment, and the effects on children need to be carefully monitored. Regulations governing the entry and exit of migrants strongly influence family migration strategies and the ability of parents to maintain contact with their children. These effects need to be taken into account when regulations are designed.

For policy purposes, the most important gaps in current knowledge about children left behind by labour migrants probably concern differences among children. For instance, there is still no conclusive evidence on whether children with absent mothers suffer more problems than children with absent fathers. A sensible first stage in filling this gap would be to exploit existing household survey data.

Most published research dealing with children of undocumented migrants in Thailand consists of small-scale studies of highly disadvantaged groups such as sex workers. There have been few studies looking at mainstream migrants, or comparing migrants with the surrounding population. The best way to begin such research would be to exploit existing data from the Kanchanaburi Field Station. In Malaysia, a promising source on children of Indonesian migrants is ethnographic work carried out by Malaysian students.

More generally, there is a need for research on how immigration regulations affect family migration strategies and the well-being of the children.

**Keywords:** children, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Myanmar, Cambodia, poverty, cross-border, migration, family, social services

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Millions of Asian parents migrate internationally in search of work. Some of these parents leave their children behind; others take them along. It is easy to imagine problems arising in either case: separated children may be neglected and resentful, and accompanying children may be unable to go to school or access public health services. These sorts of images suggest a need for policy interventions. On the other hand, households of migrants often have higher incomes than households of non-migrants, and migrants and their families typically receive help from friends and relatives while working abroad. This suggests that children of migrants may not be an especially vulnerable group, and that expensive interventions may not be warranted.

To make sensible decisions on whether, where, and how to assist children of migrants requires information on the children and the problems they face. Information is needed on the numbers of children involved, on differences between them and other children, and on current policies. This paper assembles some of the necessary information, and draws out the policy and research implications.

The report looks at the following groups: children left behind by labour migrants from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand; children born to Thai nationals in Japan; children of Indonesian migrants in Malaysia, and children of migrants from Myanmar and Cambodia in Thailand. These groups were chosen because they represent a variety of different circumstances, and because there are at least some data available for them. Also, with the exception of children born to Thai nationals in Japan, large numbers of children are involved. The trafficking of individual children, and migration by children without parents, falls outside the scope of the report (which is already wide). Ideally, the report would use a consistent definition of what age groups constitute children. Unfortunately, however, the information sources rarely provide sufficient information to do so.

Section 2 of the report summarizes existing knowledge on these groups. Section 3 discusses policy implications. Section 4 identifies gaps in existing knowledge, and suggests ways to fill these gaps. Section 5, the concluding section, raises some more general points of interpretation.

## **2. EXISTING KNOWLEDGE**

### **2.1 Children left behind by labour migrants from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand**

#### **2.1.1 Basic numbers**

The Philippines has more data on all aspects of international migration than do Indonesia or Thailand. Even in the Philippines, however, data on children of migrants are highly uncertain and incomplete. For all three countries, it is often necessary to make inferences about children of migrants from data on the migrants themselves. Given available data, the estimates given in this section are necessarily first approximations. Section 4.1.2 discusses how, with sufficient resources, it might be possible to construct more solid estimates.

### *The Philippines*

The Philippines has a relatively long history of international labour migration. By 1975-1979 it was already sending 76,000 contract workers overseas each year (Skeldon 1992). In 2002, annual deployments of workers through the government's migration service had reached 892,000 (see Appendix Table 1.)

In the late 1990s, KAKAMMPI<sup>1</sup>, an NGO working with migrant families, estimated that parents working overseas had left behind 5.85 million children aged 0-17. This number was reportedly constructed from census, survey, and Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) data (Alunan-Melgar and Borromeo 2002). It is difficult to see how these sources would permit such a precise estimate. The Appendix to this report uses data on numbers of labour migrants and some back-of-the-envelope calculations to derive some alternative estimates. These calculations suggest that something on the order of 3-6 million children aged 0-14 have been left behind by parents working overseas, which is broadly consistent with the KAKAMMPI figure. The calculations also confirm the widespread claim that the number of children left behind has been increasing over time.

In 2000, there were 33 million aged 0-17 in the Philippines (UN Population Division 2002). A figure of 3-6 million children of migrants implies that something like one in ten or one in five Filipino children have a parent overseas.

A survey of children aged 10-21 in Manila City, Davao City, Iliolo City, and Pangasinan in 2001 found that 45 per cent of children of migrants had their mother overseas, 49 per cent had their father overseas, and 6 per cent had both overseas (University of the Philippines, Tel Aviv University et al. 2002). At first sight, these statistics seem inconsistent with POEA statistics suggesting that a substantial majority of new contract workers are women. As discussed in the Appendix, however, there is no inconsistency.

Children of migrants are more likely to have relatives from outside the nuclear family living in the same household, especially if both parents are overseas. Table 1 shows data on the households of 709 elementary school children covered by a survey of four provinces in 1996. Ninety per cent of children with both parents overseas had a member of the extended family living in their household, while only 25 per cent of children with no parents overseas had a member of the extended family in their household. Root and De Jong (1991) found a similar pattern in a 1980 survey of rural households in Ilocos Norte.

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<sup>1</sup> Kapisanan ng mga Kamag-anak ng Migranteng Manggagawang Pilipino, Inc.



**Table 1: The proportion of school children having a cousin, aunt, uncle, or grandparent living in the same household, by migrant status of parents, Philippines**

Migrant status of parents	Cousin, aunt, uncle, or grandparent in household
Both parents non-migrants	25%
Father migrant, mother non-migrant	39%
Mother migrant, father non-migrant	63%
Both parents migrants	90%

Source: Battistella and Gastardo-Conaco (1998: 231).

A small study among school students in 1987 found that, for children with parents working overseas, the average time overseas was just over five years; a larger study of students in 2003 obtained similar results (Cruz 1987: 14; CBCP, SMC et al. 2004: 14-15). These estimates are, however, based on students' responses. As the authors of the second report note, children's estimates of time away may not be particularly accurate.

The typical length of a formal employment contract is two years. Some employers allow their employees to return home once a year, particularly if the employee has already served a two-year contract. Migrant workers who have the appropriate documentation and who live in countries close to the Philippines, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, often visit home more frequently. Unregistered workers may have to wait longer: for instance, workers in Italy reportedly wait to legalize their position in an amnesty before making their first visit home.<sup>2</sup> If the children's estimates of time overseas are correct, they imply that most migrant parents serve more than one contract.

Eighty-six per cent of the children with migrant fathers interviewed for the 2003 study reported that their fathers had ever come back for a visit; the equivalent figure for children with migrant mothers was 77 per cent. Averaging across the two groups, 60 per cent of visits had been within the last year, and over 90 per cent within the past two years (CBCP, SMC et al. 2004: 14-15). The 1987 study had obtained similar results (Cruz 1987: 14). Once again, children's reports need to be treated cautiously.

### *Indonesia*

As the data in Table 2 show, the numbers of contract workers leaving Indonesia through official channels has risen sharply over recent years. If the length of the average contract was about two years, the total stock of migrants overseas in the year 2002 would have been on the order of 700,000. At recent fertility rates, the average woman will have had about 1.6 children by the time she reaches 30 (UN Population Division 2002). Assuming migrants have something like 1-1.5 children each implies that somewhat less than one million children have been left behind in Indonesia.

<sup>2</sup> Arnel de Guzman, personal communication, 26 July 2004.

**Table 2: Official data on Indonesian contract workers, 1980-2002**

	1980-84	1985-89	1990-94	1995-99	2000-02
Average annual departures	24,400	63,500	118,000	321,300	342,241
Sex					
Male				31%	20%
Female				69%	80%

Sources: International Organization for Migration (2003: Table 1.1) and Soeprbo (2004: Table 3.1)

This figure does not include children left behind by irregular migrants. As is discussed in Section 2.3.1, there may be hundreds of thousands of irregular Indonesian workers in Malaysia. Migrants to Malaysia are, however, much more likely to take their families with them than are migrants to the Middle East or to other destinations in Asia (Hugo 1995: 282). It seems likely that the number of children left behind by irregular migrants is smaller than the number left behind by regular migrants. The figure of somewhat less than one million can perhaps be rounded up to one million. As should be clear, this number is only an educated guess, and should not be taken too literally.

In 2000, there were 78 million Indonesians aged 0-17 (UN Population Division 2002). A figure of around one million children left behind represents only 1-2 per cent of this total. However, a full 17 per cent of Indonesian children aged 10-14 live without their mother, their father, or both (Population Council 2001: Table 2). This suggests that international migration is a relatively minor cause of separation between parents and children. (The major causes are presumably internal migration and marital breakdown.)

Regular migration, as indicated in Table 2, is heavily weighted towards females. This suggests that children left behind by regular migrants are much more likely to be without mothers than father. The ratio would not be as high as Table 2 seems to imply, however, if migrant women were disproportionately likely to be unmarried or childless. Irregular migration (mainly to Malaysia) appears to be weighted much more heavily towards men (Hugo 1995: 279), which would reduce the overall ratio of absent mothers to absent fathers.

#### *Thailand*

In recent years, Thailand has sent only about half as many contract workers overseas as Indonesia (Table 3). This suggests a figure of about half a million children left behind, though again this figure is only an educated guess. In 2000, there were about 19 million children aged 0-14. A figure of half a million children left behind that perhaps 2-3 per cent of these children have a parent overseas. As can be seen in Table 3, regular migration from Thailand is weighted towards males, suggesting that children left behind are more likely to have absent fathers than absent mothers.

**Table 3: Official data on Thai contract workers, 1980-2002**

	1980-84	1985-89	1990-94	1995-99	2000-02
Average annual departures	60,100	89,600	86,800	193,100	170,306
Sex					
Male				85%	83%
Female				15%	17%

Sources: International Organization for Migration (2003 #126: Table 1.1) and Chalamwong (2004: Table 3).

### 2.1.2 Effects on children's welfare

“Working abroad is absolutely related to my family life. My son is so upset and crying a lot when he has been told to leave school because I can't afford it, even while I went to work in Bangkok. So, it is necessary for me to go back to work abroad, then my son can go to school.” (Villager from Northeast Thailand, quoted in Jones and Kittisuksathit (2003: 528))

#### *The Philippines*

Even critics of international labour migration accept that the migration of parents usually benefits children economically (Dizon-Anonuevo and Anonuevo 2002). Migrants on average receive incomes that are four to five times higher than they would at home, which is usually more than enough to offset the costs of the migration, and hence to boost standards of living (University of the Philippines, Tel Aviv University et al. 2002; CBCP, SMC et al. 2004: 30-31)

Some of this extra money is spent on sending children to private schools, which are generally considered to be superior to state schools. The 2003 study of school children cited above found that children of migrants were much more likely to go to private schools than children of non-migrants (CBCP, SMC et al. 2004: Tables 2, 10). The same study found that, within each school, children of migrants received slightly better marks on average than children of non-migrants. The 1996 study of school children, however, found that children of migrants and non-migrants received essentially the same marks,<sup>3</sup> as did a 2002 survey in Manila City, Davao City, Iloilo City, and Pangasinan carried out by researchers from the University of the Philippines, Tel Aviv University, and the NGO KAIBIGAN (2002: 10).<sup>4</sup> The same survey found that children of migrants and children of non-migrants had the same probability of attending school.

<sup>3</sup> Despite the similarity in grades, the same study found that students with fathers absent had much poorer class rankings than students with both parents present, while students with mothers absent or with both mothers and fathers absent had even worse rankings. There appear, however, to have been problems in implementing the rankings indicator, as rankings were obtained for only about half the sample. It is probably better to disregard these results, and pay more attention to the grades, which were obtained for almost all the sample.

<sup>4</sup> A monograph based on this study is scheduled for completion at the end of 2004. However, Professor Josefina Cabigon kindly supplied a copy of the executive summary from an earlier technical report.

One survey suggests that child of migrants are healthier than children of non-migrants. The health indicators used in the survey are ability to perform physical activities such as sports and climbing stairs, and reports of illness or pain (University of the Philippines, Tel Aviv University et al. 2002: 12).

However, while children of migrants do well in many respects, some people argue that migration of parents causes psychological or relationship problems. For instance, staff from Migrante Anak Pamilya, a non-governmental organization working with families of migrants, report cases of children becoming estranged from their parents and seeing them only as sources of gifts and money, or of children blaming problems such as delinquency, drugs, and premarital sex on parents' absence.<sup>5</sup> Additional problems are cited in the research literature. There are claims that children of migrants have difficulty making decisions, because they are used to having two layers of authority in the family (first their caregivers and then the absent parent) (Alunan-Melgar and Borromeo 2002: 111). There are claims that children of migrants are spoiled and wasteful (Nagasaka 1998: 87), or lonely and resentful (Anoneuvo 2002). In addition, some writers argue that migration leads to marital problems (Dizon-Anonuevo 2002: 25), which in turn cause difficulties for children. Many researchers state that psychological difficulties are most likely when the mother is the parent who migrates.

While it is important to acknowledge the existence of these problems, it is also importance to acknowledge that the same or similar problems occur in families of non-migrants. To establish that migration causes more problems than it alleviates, and that children of migrants deserve special attention, requires comparative data. The prevalence of psychological and relationship problems among children of migrants must be assessed against the prevalence of such problems among children of non-migrants. A number of studies have used this strategy.

Battistella's and Conaco's (1998) study of school children found little or no evidence that children of migrant had greater psychological problems, on average, than children of non-migrants. For instance, on one standardized measure used in the study, the Social Anxiety Scale for Children, children of migrants actually scored slightly better than children of non-migrants. On the other standardized measure used, the Children's Loneliness Scale, the scores were virtually identical. The larger 2003 school study found that children of migrants performed slightly better than children of non-migrants on both measures (CBCP, SMC et al. 2004: Table 12).

The 2003 school study found no systematic difference between children of migrants and children of non-migrants in reports of verbal, physical, or sexual abuse (CBCP, SMC et al. 2004: Table 12). Children's ratings of their parents marriages were also the same for all groups, except for children of migrant mothers. The study authors note, however, that with divorce impossible and legal separation difficult, migration may be a woman's only way of escaping from a failed marriage (CBCP, SMC et al. 2004: 35)

The 2002 survey cited above likewise found no evidence that children of migrants had more relationship problems or psychological problems than children of migrants. A partial exception was that marital problems may have been more

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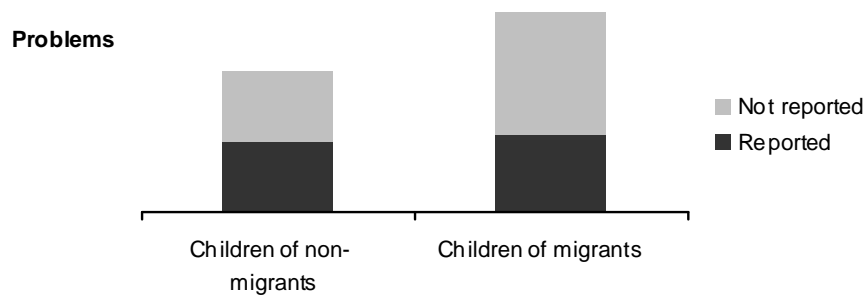
<sup>5</sup> Interview with Nick Arcilla and colleagues from Migrante Anak Pamilya, 28 July 2004.

common among migrant families. But like the authors of the 2003 school study, the authors of this study point out that the direction of causation is unclear.

Finally, an analysis of data from the 1994 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Survey examined whether the likelihood of a 15-19 year old having premarital sex, drinking alcohol, or smoking was affected by growing up with both parents at home. The researchers controlled statistically for the confounding influences such as education and religion. They failed to detect any effect from having both parents at home (Choe, Hatmadji et al. 2004).

Results from comparative studies like the ones described here are sometimes dismissed on methodological grounds. According to the critics, the reason why such studies fail to detect differences between children of migrants and non-migrants is that sensitive events or emotions are under-reported (Anoneuvo 2002: 74). Under-reporting certainly occurs, as the authors of the comparative studies themselves point out (Choe, Hatmadji et al. 2004:13). However, for the comparative studies to find similar outcomes when children of migrants in fact have more problems, it would be necessary for under-reporting to be systematically higher among children of migrants. Figure 1 gives a schematic representation of the pattern required. It is difficult to see why this would happen.

**Figure 1: Pattern of under-reporting required to invalidate results from comparative studies**



There are, moreover, reasons to expect that children of migrants might not suffer more psychological problems than children of non-migrants in the Philippines. One reason was outlined by the Institute of Labour and Manpower Studies (1984) 20 years ago. They pointed out that poverty is a potent source of family problems, and that, in the Philippines, migration is usually an effective way of alleviating poverty.

Another, very important, reason for the positive outcomes is help from the extended family. Virtually all research on migration in the Philippines emphasizes that children and their parents do not have to cope with the effects of migration on their own. Just as the extended family plays a major role in the decision to migrate, in the preparations for migration, and in the spending of remittance money, it also helps fill the gap left by the absent parent. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, and god-parents can all play a role, with arrangements varying from family to family (Lauby and Stark 1988; Root and De Jong 1991; Battistella and Gastardo-Conaco 1998; Nagasaka 1998: 85; Alunan-Melgar and Borromeo 2002; Anoneuvo and Guerra 2002). The major contribution made by the extended family plays in migration is illustrated by the data on household structure in Table 1. The differences between children of migrants and

non-migrants imply that members of the extended family are brought into households when parents migrate, or that parents are much more likely to migrate when the household already contains members of the extended family.

Modern technology also helps parents maintain contact even when they are away. Parents now use cell phones and text messages to communicate with their children and the children's caregivers. Phone companies have taken notice, and many billboards in Manila are aimed at Overseas Filipino Workers and their families. Finally, many parents presumably do not migrate unless they think their children can cope.<sup>6</sup>

There is evidence, however, that the extended family has more difficulty substituting for absent mothers than for absent fathers. Respondents interviewed for the 2002 study by the University of the Philippines and others were somewhat more likely to be sad or worried about their family if the mother was absent than if the father was absent (2002: 10-11). When asked which parent they would miss the most, children interviewed for the 2003 school study were more likely to choose the mother (CBCP, SMC et al. 2004: 18).

### *Indonesia*

Research on the effects of international migration on Indonesian children and families is limited (Dwiyanto and Keban 1997). There are, however, a few suggestive results, most of which are reminiscent of results from the Philippines.

Existing studies have found, as expected, that remittances make an important contribution towards household finances. The money is typically used to meet daily needs, to buy land, build houses, accumulate savings, and pay for children's educations (Adi 2003: 148). An illustrative example is provided by Wong (2003: 193), who describes a husband and wife working illegally in Malaysia. The couple would like to return home, but told interviewer that they would have to remain in Malaysia if their youngest child continued with her schooling.

Survey data from one village in Java showed that that divorce, separation, and widowhood were unusually high among returned female contract workers. However, as in the Filipino studies cited above, it was unclear whether marital breakdown had been a result or a cause of migration (Hugo 1995: 295).

A study of the women migrating to Saudi Arabia in East Java in the 1980s found little evidence of negative effects among children (Hugo 1995: 294). Results from the 1998 Baseline Survey of Young Adult Reproductive Welfare suggest that having both parents in the household makes not difference to the probability that an adolescent smokes, drinks, or has premarital sex (Choe, Hatmadji et al., 2004).

The extended family plays a major role in all aspects of migration. They participate in the decision to migrate, and often lend or give money for the contract and travel (Hugo 1995: 286; Wong and Anwar 2003: 203).<sup>7</sup> The study of women migrating to Saudi Arabia cited above found that the extended family also helped take care of children left behind (Hugo 1995: 294).

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<sup>6</sup> Philip Guest, personal communication, 1 September 2004.

<sup>7</sup> In the case of female domestic workers going to the Middle East, family participation is in fact a legal obligation, since the prospective migrant must present a letter of approval from their family as part of the official administrative Hugo, G. (1995). "International labor migration and the family: some observations from Indonesia." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 4(2-3): 273-301.

### *Thailand*

The available data suggest that migration can provide a significant boost to household finances (Rigg 1989; Jones and Pardthaisong 1999; Jones and Kittisuksathit 2003). As suggested by the quote at the start of Section 2.1.2, remittance money is often used for children's schooling (Jones and Pardthaisong 1999; Jones and Kittisuksathit 2003).

Some studies have reported adverse social effects from international migration, such as marital disruption and a rise in child truancy (Poapongsakorn and Sangthanapark 1988; Pongsapich 1989). Others, however, have failed to find these effects (Rigg 1989; Jones and Pardthaisong 1999; Jones and Kittisuksathit 2003). The author of one such study suggests that the early pessimistic conclusions may have been overly influenced by some isolated but highly publicized cases in which migration contributed to murder or suicide (Rigg 1989: 39).

The only study to have systematically compared outcomes for migrants and non-migrants appears to be that of Jones and Kittisuksathit (2003). The study was based on focus groups and a survey among 719 rural households in an area of northeast Thailand with extensive international migration. The sample included households that had never sent a member overseas, that currently had a member overseas, and that had a member who had returned from overseas. Almost all respondents strongly approved of international migration by males; a somewhat smaller majority approved of migration by female. There were no significant differences in rates of marital disruption among households without migrants, with current migrants, or with returned migrants. There was little or no evidence that children left behind by migrant parents experienced a higher incidence of social problems.

The study by Jones and Kittisuksathit (2003) included an investigation of what 'quality of life' meant to villagers in the study area. The resounding conclusion was that meeting basic material needs was a precondition for achieving other goals, such as family harmony. The villagers saw international migration as an effective way of meeting basic material needs. As one respondent said,

"I do agree with you (about social problems of migration) but I found that when families have got money problems, then family problems would occur, and I think working abroad is the best way to earn more money."  
(Jones and Kittisuksathit 2003: 528)

The villagers did nevertheless regard migration of parents as an experience that both the parents and the children would rather avoid. The families that were rich enough not to need migrant remittances did not send members overseas (Jones and Kittisuksathit 2003).

Results from the 1994 Family and Youth Survey suggest that having both parents in the household while growing up does reduce the probability that an adolescent aged 15-19 will smoke, drink alcohol, or have premarital sex (Choe, Hatmadji et al. 2004). It is not known whether some types of parental absence, such as temporary migration, have different effects on these behaviors than other types of absence, such as marital disruption.

As in the Philippines and Indonesia, the main factor protecting children from at least some of the social problems that could arise from international migration seems to be the extended family (Rigg 1989: 39-40).

### **2.1.3 Policies towards children of migrants**

The Philippines government provides a wide range of services to international migrants, some of which are directly relevant to children left behind. In 2002, for instance, a network of 25 Family Welfare Officers was launched, based in areas with heavy concentrations of migration. Their duties include collecting information on families of migrants, designing interventions, providing advice, and acting as advocates. The Department of Labor and Employment and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration provide information and counseling to families of migrants. Overseas Filipino Workers are covered by a welfare fund, and they and their families have access to special credit facilities (International Organization for Migration 2003: 101, 146, 150) (CBCP, SMC et al. 2004: 59-60).

The Philippines also has a large and active NGO sector seeking to assist migrants and their families through advocacy, counseling, and reintegration services. Migrante Anak Pamilya, an NGO consulted in the preparation of this paper, is one example. Its activities include workshops for children of migrants and their caregivers, provision of information to entertainers, and the publication of a magazine for children of migrants. Another example is the Episcopal Commission on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ECMI), the service arm of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. The ECMI provides information about migrant issues, gives legal advice and counseling to migrants and their families, and organizes livelihood training and microfinance (CBCP, SMC et al. 2004: 59)

Neither Thailand nor Indonesia have the same extensive system of governmental and non-governmental services catering to families of labour migrants. The services that do exist, such as the pre-departure seminars organized in both countries and the welfare fund in Thailand, are aimed at the migrants themselves (International Organization for Migration 2003: 98-99). In Thailand, NGOs working on international migration are focus on migrants coming from neighbouring countries.

An online directory of a number of NGOs serving migrants in the Asian region is maintained by the Scalabrini Migration Center at [www.smc.org.ph/directory/ngodir.htm](http://www.smc.org.ph/directory/ngodir.htm).

## **2.2 Children of Thai Nationals in Japan**

The Thai embassy in Japan estimates that there are approximately 50,000 Thai nationals living legally or illegally in Japan, and that these people have 4,000-5,000 children. The embassy estimates that about half the children have no citizenship (Asian Labour News, 20 January 2004, citing Achara Ashayagachat, "2,000 Thai children stateless in Japan", The Bangkok Post, 20 January 2004).

Approximately one half of the Thai adults in Japan are there illegally. Many of these people are reluctant to register their children with the Thai embassy, or with the Japanese authorities, for fear of being deported. Obtaining Japanese nationality can be difficult. People born in Japan are granted Japanese nationality only if one of their parents is Japanese. If the child's father is Japanese and the mother Thai, the father must acknowledge paternity before the child is born for the child to be granted Japanese at birth (Migrant News, January 1995, March 1997, September 2000).



When the children without nationality become adults, it will be extremely difficult for them to find legal employment. The Thai embassy expects that many will be deported to Thailand after turning 18 (Migrant News, September 2000; Asian Labour News, 20 January 2004).

Many Japanese, including some politicians, are heavily opposed to foreign immigration. The Japanese constitution does not protect foreigners from discrimination. Advocates for foreigners have, however, won cases using alternative means. One couple, for instance, used a nineteenth century law as the basis for a successful appeal to the Supreme Court, allowing them to adopt an abandoned baby believed to have a Filipino mother. Meanwhile, Japanese social workers are encouraging foreign mothers to register stateless children with the mothers' embassies (Migrant News, January 1995, December 1999, August 2002). Recently, the foreign women with children born to Japanese partners are beginning to receive 'special residents permits'. These permits are granted at the discretion of the Minister of Justice.<sup>8</sup>

## **2.3 Children of foreign migrants in Malaysia and Thailand**

### **2.3.1 Basic numbers**

#### *Malaysia*

There are substantial migrant communities in both Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah; Indonesian migrants are, however, concentrated in Peninsular Malaysia. In June 2003, there were about 670,000 registered Indonesian workers in Peninsular Malaysia, and something like 300,000 unregistered workers.<sup>9</sup> The number of foreign workers in Malaysia has fallen since the mid-1990s, due to the financial crisis of the late 1990s, and to government campaigns against foreign workers, including amnesties and mass deportations (Kanapathy 2004: 10-13).

Some of the Indonesian workers in Malaysia migrate temporarily to supplement household incomes and, like workers going to the Middle East or East Asia, do not take their children with them. Other Indonesians settle in Malaysia, and establish families. Around Kuala Lumpur there are long-standing Indonesian squatter settlements (Hugo 1995; Dwiyanto and Keban 1997; Peng 1997; Wong and Anwar 2003). It is difficult to tell from available sources whether the majority of migrants are at the temporary or permanent ends of the spectrum. There is not necessarily any relationship between registration and length of stay, since both settlers and temporary migrants are known to register (Wong and Anwar 2003). It is therefore virtually impossible to estimate the numbers of children involved, though it is presumably in the tens or hundreds of thousands.

#### *Thailand*

From 1 to 31 July 2004, the Thai government allowed foreigners working in Thailand, and their dependants, to officially register themselves in the country. Altogether 1.12 million migrants from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos completed the first stage of the

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<sup>8</sup> Aiko Kikkawa, personal communication, 28 September 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Kanapathy (2004) estimates that there are 300,000-400,000 unregistered workers in Peninsular Malaysia; 88 per cent of unregistered workers responding to an amnesty in 1998 were Indonesians (Wong and Anwar 2003).

registration process. Of these, three-quarters were from Myanmar, and 93,082 were less than 14 years old (Archavanitkul 2005: 16-17).

These figures omit children of unregistered migrants. However, as discussed below, registration conveys important advantages, such as an improved chance of avoiding deportation, and the opportunity to attend school. It is therefore possible that compliance has been high, and the number of unregistered children of migrants small. Assuming, however, that new migrants continue to enter Thailand, the number of unregistered children will grow over time.

In addition, children migrating on their own are likely to be significantly under-counted. Children in Myanmar are unable to obtain identification documents until they turn 16 (Caouette, no date: 145-6, 191), which prevents them from registering in Thailand. There are therefore likely to be more than 100,000 migrant children under 14 years of age in Thailand.

### **2.3.2 Policies towards children of migrants, and the effect of migration on children's welfare**

#### *Malaysia*

Indonesian migrants mainly come from rural areas, and are able to earn higher incomes in Malaysia than they would have at home: that is why they migrate (Wong and Anwar 2003). Children of Indonesian migrants presumably share in these material gains.

Children of migrants are likely to face problems accessing government health and education services. The severity of these problems is, however, unclear. Integration into the dominant Malay society is relatively easy for Indonesians, at least compared to migrants from other countries such as Bangladesh or Myanmar. There are also established systems for purchasing identification documents, and for getting children admitted to school (Dorall 1988; Wong and Anwar 2003). Schools and health facilities in areas with concentrations of migrants complain that provision of service to migrants is putting them under financial strain (Peng 1997). This suggests that migrants' attempts to access public services have been successful (though it is also possible that schools and health facilities exaggerate to secure extra funding.)

#### *Thailand*

Unlike, for instance, Filipino migrants in the Middle East, many migrants from Myanmar in Thailand, were forced out of their home communities by war or by confiscation of their property (Panam, Zaw et al. 2004). The extreme poverty of many migrants from Myanmar and Cambodia, and their lack of options, can increase the risks of trafficking or entry into the sex industry (Caouette, no date). However, many migrants to Thailand from Cambodia and Myanmar have much in common with 'normal' labour migrant, albeit very poor ones. They follow in the footsteps of friends and relatives, drawing on their experience. They take dirty and dangerous work in farms, factories, fishing boats, construction sites, and middle class homes, earning less than local people, but more than they would in their country of origin. Some bring their children along, others leave them at home with relatives. Many send remittances or save money for their return home (Skeldon 2001: 32; Amarapibal, Beesey et al. 2003: 251-9, 273; Caouette, no date: 37, 109)

Some of the problems faced by children of migrants in Thailand appear to be attributable to their migrant status. Many children, for instance, have had limited access to government health services and schools (Amarapibal, Beesey et al. 2003: 237, 286; Caouette, no date: 80-107). Other problems are probably attributable to a combination of migration and sheer poverty. An example is the problem of young children spending all their waking hours at their parents workplaces, receiving little stimulation, and facing environmental hazards (Amarapibal, Beesey et al. 2003: 286). Poverty forces the parents to work long hours and prevents them from paying for childcare; migration from their home villages reduces the scope for using relatives as caregivers. Often migrant children are themselves employed, because their families need the income, and because the children are unable to attend school (Caouette, no date).

Beginning on 1 July 2004, the Thai government has launched an ambitious scheme to register foreigners in Thailand, which will probably improve migrant children's access to social services, at least in the short term. During July, migrant workers aged 12 or more were instructed to register and pay 3,800 baht fees, which would entitle them to work permits and health insurance. A figure of 3,800 baht was equivalent to up to three months wages for some migrants. Many employers paid the fees, and deducted them from migrants' wages. Migrant workers were permitted to register spouses and children; the children would then be entitled to free government health and education services. In later phases of the campaign, the Thai government will attempt to certify migrants in their home countries, and ultimately reduce the number of foreign workers to 500,000 (Migrant News, July 2004). In contrast to previous registration drives, workers no longer lose the right to remain in Thailand if they change employers. As critics of previous registrations have pointed out, the rule binding migrants to a particular employer had significantly reduced the migrants' bargaining power.

The registration scheme is likely to substantially increase the number of migrant children who are legally entitled to government health services and schooling. However, legal entitlement does not always translate to actual usage. Migrants sometimes claim that possessing the necessary documentation makes little difference, and that the real reason they are treated differently is their foreign origin (Amarapibal, Beesey et al., 2003: 286). It is also unclear what will happen to children of migrants once the government starts reducing the number of foreign workers who are legally permitted to work in the country.

A small number of Thai and international NGOs provide services relevant to children of migrants. CARE International, for instance, provides health care to migrants (Amarapibal, Beesey et al. 2003: 255). Save The Children (UK) has helped highly disadvantaged communities on the Thai-Burmese border to organize projects involving HIV/AIDS education, preservation of local culture, and the prevention of drug abuse (Caouette, no date).

### **3. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

#### **3.1 Children left behind by labour migrants from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand**

People working with children of migrants in the Philippines have devised a number of interventions that are practical, inexpensive, and applicable to other countries. Researchers, NGO workers, and government officials consulted during the preparation of this report all proposed using radio, television, schools, magazines, pre-departure seminars, and migrant organizations to share advice and information on the care of children of migrants. One simple parenting trick disseminated, for instance, by Migrante Anak Pamilya is for the absent parent to choose the child's bedtime story. Even if the absent parent cannot read the story, the child still feels that the parent has participated. Similarly, families that have experienced international migration can tell families of potential migrants what to expect.

Many people in the Philippines also suggested using teachers to monitor children of migrants. If teachers detect problems, they are expected to direct the children to guidance counselors and other qualified people, or perhaps to intervene themselves. Ideally, teachers would be given some training in what to expect and how to react. Coverage of children in the primary school ages would be good in the Philippines, and also in Thailand and Indonesia, since enrollment is virtually complete in all three countries. Coverage of children in the secondary school would be somewhat less satisfactory, as gross enrollment rates (the number of children at school divided by the number in the eligible age group) are 83 per cent in Thailand, 82 per cent in the Philippines, and 58 per cent in Indonesia.<sup>10</sup> The advantage of using teachers is that they already know the children well, and their services could be relatively inexpensive. The disadvantage is that many teachers may already feel overloaded.

More ambitious interventions are also proposed, and have been implemented on a small scale, in the Philippines. Examples include workshops with children and caregivers, and individual counseling. Some of these interventions presumably have a high cost per child served. The studies cited in Section 2.1.2 suggest that the proportion of children of migrants with serious problems is relatively small. To the extent that this is true, the costs per truly disadvantaged child are potentially very high.

Alternative uses for these funds need to be considered. Many children of non-migrants in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand lead extremely difficult lives. Indeed, as Section 2.1.2 argues, children of migrants do not seem, on average, to be a particularly disadvantaged group. Service providers need to consider whether money spent on expensive projects for children of migrants might do more good if it were spent elsewhere. If subsequent research were to show, however, that particular groups among children of migrants suffered special disadvantages, then intensive interventions aimed at these groups might be justified. In the Philippines, the number of children with parents overseas is so large that even a subset of children of migrants could include many people.

The appropriate role for international organizations is probably different in the Philippines and in Indonesia and Thailand. In the Philippines, a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental organizations are working with children of labour migrants, so that new participants would need to find ways to complement work already underway. The evaluation of current interventions and the dissemination

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<sup>10</sup> The enrollment data were obtained from the World Bank's World Development Indicators online database. They refer to 2000-2001. The data were downloaded in August 2004.

of information are two possibilities. In Indonesia and Thailand, children of migrants (other than foreign migrants in Thailand) currently receive little attention. Here, there may be scope to put children of labour migrants on to the agenda of governmental and non-governmental organizations. Any decision to do so should preferably be based on more information than is currently available.

### **3.2 Children of Thai nationals in Japan**

Children of Thai nationals in Japan share problems in common with children of other nationalities. For instance, there has reportedly been an increase in Filipino and Chinese women entering Japan for arranged marriages with Japanese men. The majority of these marriages are reputed to end in divorce, which presumably leads to cases of fathers refusing to acknowledge paternity (Migration News, February 1998, August 2002). Since the 1980s, there has also been a rise in permanent settlement by foreign nationals, and the development of distinctive ethnic neighbourhood in Tokyo (Tajima 2000). Japan faces difficult questions about what legal rights to give to children of non-Japanese born in Japan.

These questions are not unique to Japan. Other countries that officially prevent settlement by foreigners also presumably have children lacking citizenship because of their foreign parents. It would be surprising if the presences of large numbers of migrants in the Republic of Korea or the Gulf states did not result in the birth of significant numbers of children. As one Filipina who became pregnant while working in the United Arab Emirates told a researcher, “It’s such an unfortunate place. A lot of women got pregnant, even those who were married” (Valerio 2002). Some pregnancies are likely to result from relationships between migrant workers: that is perhaps what the interviewee implied by her reference to “even those who were married”. Other pregnancies are presumably a result of rape, given the risks that some domestic workers face from their employers.

Some people argue that if the Thai government is to advocate for the rights of children of Thai nationals in Japan, it should grant these same rights to children of Cambodian and Burmese migrants in Thailand. This argument is appealing. The analogy between migrants in Japan and migrants in Thailand cannot, however, be stretched too far. Japan is a wealthy country, with only a few thousand foreign children. As an efficiently administered island, it also has a great deal of control over who enters the country. In contrast, Thailand is a middle-income country, with hundreds of thousands of foreign children, and a long land border that it is unable to police effectively. Japan is in a much better position than Thailand to be generous to migrant children.

### **3.3 Children of foreign migrants in Malaysia and Thailand**

Providing services to children of irregular migrants can be politically and economically difficult, because of the possibility that it will attract new migrants or encourage existing migrants to settle permanently. The current Thai registration campaign therefore represents an important policy experiment, which other countries may be able to learn from. However, the campaign’s influence on children’s lives will depend on whether legal entitlements lead to actual usage. That depends partly on whether migrants have sufficient information and confidence to use the services they are entitled to. It also depends on whether schools, clinics, and other service providers

have sufficient resources to cater to the migrants, and whether they are willing to do so.

Some children of migrants, such as those working in illegal occupations or living in remote villages, will always be missed by mainstream services. There will therefore be a continuing need for special interventions like those introduced by Save the Children (Caouette, no date).

Wong (2003: 222) argues that the Malaysian government needs to accept that labour migration from Indonesia is inevitable, and that the current guest worker system is encouraging many migrants to use illegal channels. She argues that the government should adopt a more streamlined, less formal system by, for instance, requiring border passes rather than passports. This, in effect, is what the Thai government has done. Other countries might consider similar reforms, such as abandoning requirements for exit permits when migrant workers go home for visits.

The consequences of Wong's proposed scheme, and Thailand's actual scheme, for the numbers of migrants in each country is unclear. On the one hand, a flexible scheme lowers the costs of migration, and encourages more migrants to come. According to the conventional scholarly wisdom (based mainly on the recent experiences of North America and Europe), there is nothing more permanent than a temporary migrant. On the other hand, migrants may be more willing to go home, for long or short periods, if they are confident that they still have the option to return to the destination country. As Jones and Kittisuksathit (2003: 529) point out, temporary migration has not led to significant permanent migration in some major destinations such as Taiwan and South Korea.

In either case, more flexibility and greater legal acceptance of migrants seems likely to lead to better outcomes for children. Parents who opt to leave their children behind can visit home more easily, avoiding prolonged separations. Parents who take their children along have a better chance of accessing schools and health care for the children.

#### **4. GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE, AND WAYS OF FILLING THEM**

This section describes gaps in current knowledge that inhibit the design of appropriate policies and programmes. The section also describes the contributions that a variety of research methods could make towards closing these gaps. Actual research projects would probably use a combination of the methods described. A sensible strategy would be to start with the cheaper methods, such as the analysis of existing survey data and the review of existing research.

Predicting in advance what information will be useful for policymaking is difficult. This section therefore casts the net widely.

This report is based on a typology that distinguishes between (i) children left behind by parents migrating overseas; (ii) children born overseas to migrant parents; and (iii) children taken overseas by migrant parents. The final part of this section argues that categories (ii) and (iii) be combined in future research.

##### **4.1 Children left behind by labour migrants from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand**

### 4.1.1 Gaps in knowledge

As Section 2.1.1 makes clear, there is a dearth of basic information about children of migrants. There are not even any reliable estimates of the numbers of children involved, or their ages and geographical distribution. There is limited information on the age and sex of absent parents and on family structure in the Philippines, but much less in Indonesia and Thailand. Even in the Philippines, it is not known whether people are less likely to go overseas after having children. Moreover, even in the Philippines, there are few data on the length of time spent overseas, and the frequency of visits home. There are also few data showing trends over time.

Information on the welfare of children of migrants and non-migrants is relatively plentiful in the Philippines. It would be possible to make further progress by going into greater depth, such as studying long-term effects. It would be useful to collect data on a nationally representative sample, to look for differences by age and gender, to probe the finding that migration leads to the substitution of private schools for public ones, but not increased participation. However, the first priority is probably to disaggregate different types of children of migrants, to see if the relatively favorable averages are concealing problems within particular groups, such as (speculatively) children with absent mothers, or very young children. Ideally, results would be compared with results for children of non-migrants. Indonesia and Thailand have some way to go just to catch up with current levels of information in the Philippines.

Much could also potentially be learned from evaluating current programmes serving children of migrants. These evaluations would presumably occur in the Philippines, since that is where all such programmes appear to be based. Few if any evaluations seem to have been carried out. The International Organization for Migration in Manila, and the Scalabrini Migration Centre have both assessed programmes for migrants themselves, but not for children of migrants. To improve services and allocate funding it would be useful to know whether, for instance, existing counseling services for children of migrants have an appreciable effect on the children's wellbeing, or whether existing methods of disseminating information are reaching a significant number of people.

### 4.1.2 Ways to fill the gaps

#### *Analysis of administrative data*

The governments of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand all collect information on migrants passing through the formal migration system. The Philippines Overseas Employment System appears to collect the most information, but even they do not collect information on marital status or children. All the data, by definition, exclude undocumented migrants. Administrative data do not appear to hold much promise for research on children of migrants.

#### *Further review of the research literature*

Because of time limitations, the review of existing knowledge in Section 2 left out some potential sources of information on children of migrants in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. As well as consulting these sources, further reviews of the literature might look at experiences from other parts of the world, and might, for instance, examine the research literature on family change or on the psychological effects of parental absence. An examination of the international literature might also

uncover information on other countries' services for children of migrants. It is unlikely that much of the information gathered through a wider search of the secondary literature would feed directly into policy advice for the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. But literature reviews can yield valuable background information, and can be highly cost effective.

#### *Analysis of existing survey data*

The Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand have all had many nationally representative, general purpose household surveys. Most of these are unsuited to studying children of international migrants, however, since they do not include questions on household members absent at the time of the survey. There are, however, exceptions, such as the 1988 Demographic and Health Survey, the 2000 Census, and the forthcoming 2005 Mid-Decade Census in the Philippines, and the National Migration Surveys in Thailand. Single rounds of the Thai National Migration Surveys, and similar surveys in Indonesia, are unlikely to contain sufficiently many children of migrants to permit statistical analyses, since children of migrants make up a small proportion of the population in both countries. However, it may be possible to boost sample sizes by pooling data from two or more rounds of the survey. If it is reasonable to assume that children of long-term internal migrants face the same issues as children of long-term international migrants, then it may be possible to pool data for the two groups, which substantially would expand the number of cases.

In Thailand, an alternative, and highly promising, source of data on children of migrants is the Kanchanaburi Field Station. This project, operated by Institute for Population and Social Research at Mahidol University, has generated five years of longitudinal data on a population of approximately 50,000 people. Several hundred people migrate overseas from the study site each year. The sample is not nationally representative, but the longitudinal nature of the data is ample compensation for this.

Using existing survey data, it would be possible to fill most of the gaps in basic factual information discussed in Section 7.1.1. The Kanchanaburi data could not be used to estimate national totals of children of migrants. However it is probably the only data source that could be used to estimate lengths of stay and frequency of visits. The surveys contain some simple measures of children's situation, such as school enrollment, household assets, and health status. Analysis would be constrained by small sample sizes, but it might nevertheless be possible to make some progress in comparing outcomes among various subgroups of children of migrants and non-migrants, such as those with absent mothers versus those with absent fathers.

The enormous advantage of using existing survey data is that the research can be fast and inexpensive.

#### *Collecting new survey data*

Customized surveys allow researchers to address issues that general surveys miss. For instance, as discussed in Section 2.1.2, customized surveys in the Philippines have yielded data on children's opinions about migration, their school grades, and their score on various psychometric tests.

Further customized surveys in the Philippines would only be justified if they could collect more in-depth information than previous surveys. One possibility, suggested by researchers from the Scalabrini Migration Centre, is to re-interview



respondents from earlier surveys, to try to measure long-term effects from parental migration. These sorts of studies are only worthwhile if response rates are high, so that serious selectivity biases are avoided. As experience from the Malaysian Life History Survey shows, however, acceptable response rates can be achieved, even in a developing country, after a long interval, with no provision for re-interviews in the original survey design (Haaga, Vanzo et al. 1994).

In Indonesia and Thailand, there would still be some value in carrying out relatively straightforward surveys, since much less research has been done in these two countries. The most efficient strategy would probably be to build on earlier Filipino studies, with the participation of the researchers who conducted the Filipino studies.

The great disadvantage of customized surveys is that they are expensive. Expenses are particularly high for phenomena such as international migration from Indonesia and Thailand, where the numbers involved are small relative to the national population. These expenses can be mitigated through careful sample selection, as described in Bilsborrow, Hugo, Oberai, and Zlotnik (1997: 267-287). There is also scope for using cheaper, but less statistically pure, rapid assessment techniques, like those developed by UNICEF.

#### *Qualitative data*

Qualitative data techniques could be used to contribute background information on children of migrants, through, for instance, providing information on the responsibilities of extended family members. However, the main contribution of qualitative techniques to policy development would probably be through improvements in the assessment of child well-being. Qualitative techniques could provide information on sensitive topics such as marital discord. They could also be used to capture the perspectives of the children themselves.

Ideally, qualitative data collection would be comparative, including children of migrants and non-migrants. Just as with quantitative data collection, this would allow researchers to assess the extent to which children of migrants experiences different problems from children of non-migrants.

As with customized surveys, the main disadvantage of qualitative techniques are that they are usually expensive and slow. The collection and analysis of qualitative data typically require large amounts of time by highly qualified people.

#### *Evaluation of interventions*

Methods for evaluating interventions vary from the collection of participant narratives to the use of quantitative measurements and statistical controls. The more formal methods tend to be more persuasive for policymakers. There is little to prevent such methods from being used to evaluate programmes serving children of migrants.

## **4.2 Children of Thai nationals in Japan**

### **4.2.1 Gaps in knowledge**

Little information is available on children's access to schools and other social services if they lack citizenship papers. As discussed in Section 2.2, the case of Thai nationals

in Japan also prompts questions about the stateless children in South Korea or the Middle East. Very little is known about these children.

#### **4.2.2 Ways to fill these gaps**

In Japan, and possibly Korea, it would be possible to gather information directly from the migrants and their children, provided that due care were taken to gain people's confidence and protect their privacy. The Thai embassy appears to have had some success in reaching Thai residents. However, such research is likely to be difficult or impossible in the Middle East.

An acceptable substitute would be to interview recent returnees in the country of origin. Researchers could, for instance, ask returnees whether any of their co-workers became pregnant, what happens to children born overseas. The classic example of this type of research is Parish's and Whyte's (1978) study of Communist China, conducted by interviewing recent migrants to Hong Kong.

### **4.3 Children of foreign migrants in Malaysia and Thailand**

#### **4.3.1 Gaps in knowledge**

Most research on migrants coming to Malaysia and Thailand has concentrated on a few highly disadvantaged groups such as sex workers. Much less is known about the remaining migrants, despite their much larger numbers (Skeldon 2001). Evidence on problems experienced by migrant children in Malaysia and Thailand is therefore mainly anecdotal. This makes it very difficult to design interventions or assign priorities.

Access to health and education services is a crucial issue for children, but there is conflicting information on whether migrants are able to bend the rules, and there are suggestions that foreign origins rather than documentation are what count. Meanwhile, the Malaysian and Thai government have been running registration campaigns with potentially large impacts on migrant children, and important lessons for countries in similar positions.

#### **4.3.2 Ways to fill these gaps**

##### *Analysis of administrative data*

Administrative data are a potentially important source of basic statistics on migrant children and their families. In Thailand at least, the data could be used to estimate the distribution of children by age, sex, country of origin, location in Thailand, and family structure. As Punpuing and Guest (no date) have suggested, surveys in areas with concentrations of migrants could be used to estimate the ratio of unregistered to registered migrants, and hence the size and structure of the total migrant population.

##### *Further review of the research literature*

In preparing this report, it has not been possible to review all previous research on migrants in Thailand or Malaysia. There would probably be value in a more exhaustive coverage.

One promising idea would be to exploit the large number of ethnographic studies on Indonesian communities in Malaysia discussed by Wong (2003: 182). These studies have been written in Malay by MA and PhD students at Malaysian

universities, particularly the University Kebangsaan Malaysia and the University of Malaysia. According to Wong, they contain detailed descriptions of the communities. A review of these studies could potentially yield useful information on migrant children and the problems they face, though it would be necessary to note changes that have occurred since the heightened enforcement of the late 1990s.

A second idea would be to test the hypothesis, discussed in Section 3.3, that regulations facilitating movements between the host and origin countries would benefit children. This hypothesis make two assumptions: that regulations facilitating movement lead to more frequent visits home; and that more frequent visits are good for children. Both assumptions could probably be tested through a review of international research on migration and on family relations.

#### *Analysis of existing survey data*

Standard household censuses and surveys are likely to include very small numbers of clearly identified Indonesian, Burmese, and Cambodian migrants, because of under-reporting, and, in Thailand, because Burmese and Cambodian migrants make up only a small proportion of the total population. The Thai census, and other sources that define the population in de jure (legal residence) terms, miss virtually all irregular migrants.

However, data from the Kanchanaburi field station, described in Section 4.1.2, have fewer such problems. The province of Kanchanaburi has many migrants from Myanmar, and the use of a population register and repeated surveys minimizes under-reporting. The Kanchanaburi field station thus offers an opportunity, rare internationally, to assemble systematic information on children of irregular migrants. Because the field station has been running for several years, it offers the equally rare opportunity to conduct a before-after study of the effects of the registration campaign. The Kanchanaburi data would be particularly useful if they could be combined with official registration data, which should be technically possible.

#### *Collecting new survey data*

Through careful design, a customized survey could probably achieve relatively high coverage of irregular migrants. A customized survey would also provide the opportunity to study special topics, such as interactions with government officials that receive limited attention in general surveys. By forgoing national representativeness, and concentrating on areas with large concentrations of migrants, the costs of the study could be kept down. All customized surveys are, nevertheless, expensive.

#### *Qualitative data*

Irregular migration is a particularly appropriate subject for qualitative methods. Skilled users of qualitative methods can obtain far richer and more reliable data on sensitive topics such as irregular migration than can typical surveys. Qualitative research is also the only way to obtain detailed information about such topics as the implementation of registration procedures, or the process of obtaining forged birth certificates.

Good qualitative research is, however, expensive.

### *Evaluation of interventions*

The most important ‘interventions’ currently underway in Thailand and Malaysia are the registration campaigns. These should be given first priority in evaluation research. Ideally, an evaluation would be multi-disciplinary, and would draw, for instance, on government documents and data, interviews with local-level officials, interviews with migrant families, and survey data on service use.

#### **4.4 Revising the typology of children of migrants**

The terms of reference for this report divided children of international migrants into three groups: (i) children left behind by parents who had migrated overseas; (ii) children brought along by migrant parents; and (iii) children born overseas to migrant parents. Experience in compiling this report suggests that categories (ii) and (iii) should be combined.

The distinction between types (ii) and (iii) is only important in countries where rights to citizenship and public services depend strictly on place of birth, in both theory and practice. However, many countries in Asia and elsewhere do not give absolute priority to place of birth, in theory or in practice. Children born in the origin country and destination country therefore face essentially the same issues: reduced access to schools and health care, discrimination, and reduced legal rights. Conversely, both types of children face very different issues from children left in the country of origin by migrant parents. For children left behind, the main question is how separation from parents affects their social and psychological development; there is no reason to think that they suffer reduced access to services compared to their peers.

#### **4.5 Research dissemination**

Experience in writing this paper prompts one more suggestion regarding research on children of migrants.

Much applied research on children of migrants, and on migration more generally, takes the form of unpublished reports. Most of these reports have print runs of only a few hundred, and do not appear in standard bibliographic databases. They are therefore extremely difficult to locate and obtain, particularly for researchers based outside the country where the reports were written. This means that reports typically only reach a small fraction of their potential audience, and research and policy is based on a much narrower pool of shared knowledge than it could be.

The obvious solution is to publish all reports on the Internet. Where there are insufficient resources to publish both a printed version and an electronic one, preference should go to the electronic version. Most researchers and service agencies in Southeast Asia now have much better access to the Internet than they do to research libraries.

Some researchers and institutions are slow to publish electronic versions of their work. In addition, many websites are not updated regularly, so that links to electronic documents fail. Funding agencies can overcome both problems by insisting that researchers provide electronic copies of their reports, which the funding agencies post on their websites. The regional office of the International Organization for

Migration is taking a step in the right direction, as it plans to use its official website as a clearing-house for electronic documents on migration.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Hundreds of thousands of Thai and Indonesian children, and millions of Filipino children, have parents who have temporarily migrated overseas to work. Much remains to be learned about the lives of these children, particularly in Thailand and Indonesia. But the evidence to date suggests that these children do not, on average, suffer greater social and economic problems than their peers. This is because migration is generally an effective way for households to alleviate poverty, and because extended families help fill the gaps left by the absent parents. There may, nevertheless, be subgroups of children who are adversely affected by migration. It is plausible, for instance, that migration may affect young children differently from other groups. Comparing the welfare of subgroups – while maintaining comparisons with children of non-migrants – is a priority for future research.

Low-cost, well-designed policies to assist children of labour migrants are always to be encouraged. One promising example, already implemented in the Philippines, is the provision of parenting advice through migrant networks. Present evidence does not, however, justify interventions with high costs per child, since available evidence suggests that children of migrants are not a particularly disadvantaged group.

To what extent can the findings about children of labour migrants be extrapolated to other countries? Migration of parents is likely to cause the most good or do least harm when there are few other options for boosting household income, and when extended families step in to help. Both conditions are met in many developing countries. This suggests that the findings may have wide applicability.

Children brought along by their parents, or born overseas, face different challenges from children left behind. Children brought along retain contact with their parents, but they often occupy marginal positions in the destination country, and may have difficulty accessing social services. Of the three countries studied – Japan, Malaysia, and Thailand – migrant children in Thailand appear to be facing the greatest challenges. The majority of irregular migrants in Thailand come from Myanmar. In contrast to Indonesians in Malaysia, Burmese in Thailand are linguistically and culturally distinct from the local population. Many migrants from Myanmar would face major political or economic difficulties if they were to return home, which limits their bargaining power in Thailand. Existing knowledge about problems faced by children of irregular migrants in Thailand is, however, patchy. Little is known, for instance, about their actual use of health services, or whether access to health services is a bigger problem than access to schooling.

The ambitious registration scheme launched by the Thai government in 2004 has the potential to improve migrant children's lives significantly, as it offers them legal rights to service at government schools and hospitals, and offers their parents some protection from deportation and exploitation. Whether this promise is fulfilled remains to be seen. Other developing countries could, in principle, learn from the successes and failures of the scheme. An evaluation of the scheme's effect on children

could therefore make an important contribution to the international debate on migration policy.

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## Appendix

### Detailed Discussion of Data on Children Left Behind in the Philippines

#### The number of children left behind

As a check on the KAKAMMPI figure of 5.85 million children left behind by migrant parents, this section sets out some alternative estimates. The estimates are constructed by multiplying stocks of migrant workers overseas by the numbers of children per migrant. In the absence of good data, the calculations are necessarily imprecise.

Official estimates of stock of migrant workers in 2001 have been constructed by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas. These estimates are shown in Appendix Table 1. As can be seen from the table, the government estimated that there were about 2.7 million Filipinos based permanently outside the Philippines, 3.1 million contract migrants away temporarily, and a further 1.6 million irregular migrants, also away temporarily.

**Appendix Table 1: Official estimates of stocks of Filipinos overseas, 2001**

Region	Permanent	Temporary	Irregular	Total
Africa	271	31,530	10,103	41,904
Asia (East and South)	70,349	826,782	360,527	1,257,658
Asia (West)	1,546	1,233,325	123,332	1,358,203
Europe	152,851	420,232	203,249	776,332
Americas	2,291,311	286,793	848,879	3,426,983
Oceania	220,200	46,009	20,336	286,545
Based at sea		255,269		255,269
World total	2,736,528	3,099,940	1,566,426	7,402,894

*Source:* Estimates made by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, cited in the table ‘Stock Estimates of Filipinos Overseas (Inter-Agency Report)’ on the POEA website <http://www.poea.gov.ph/html/statistics.html>. Data downloaded in August 2004.

To construct these estimates, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas relied heavily on embassy statements about the number of Filipinos located in each country. Embassies generally have no systematic way of calculating these numbers. It is therefore prudent to check them against other sources. The first source is the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), which collects information on deployments – initiation of new overseas contracts – by documented migrants. Appendix Table 2 shows POEA deployment data for 1984-2002.

**Appendix Table 2: Overseas Filipino Workers deployed through the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), 1984-2002**

Year	Land-based workers	Sea-based workers	Total	Sea-based as % total	Total as % popn aged 15-59
1984	300,378	50,604	350,982	14.4%	
1985	320,494	52,290	372,784	14.0%	1.30%
1986	323,517	54,697	378,214	14.5%	
1987	382,229	67,042	449,271	14.9%	
1988	385,117	85,913	471,030	18.2%	
1989	355,346	103,280	458,626	22.5%	
1990	334,883	111,212	446,095	24.9%	1.35%
1991	489,260	125,759	615,019	20.4%	
1992	549,655	136,806	686,461	19.9%	
1993	550,872	145,758	696,630	20.9%	
1994	564,031	154,376	718,407	21.5%	
1995	488,173	165,401	653,574	25.3%	1.72%
1996	484,653	175,469	660,122	26.6%	
1997	559,227	188,469	747,696	25.2%	
1998	638,343	193,300	831,643	23.2%	
1999	640,331	196,689	837,020	23.5%	
2000	643,304	198,324	841,628	23.6%	1.95%
2001	662,648	204,951	867,599	23.6%	
2002	682,315	209,593	891,908	23.5%	

*Source:* Data on overseas Filipino workers obtained from a table entitled 'Deployed Landbased and Seabased Workers' on the website of the POEA <http://www.poea.gov.ph/html/statistics.html>. Data downloaded on 5 August 2004. Population estimates obtained from the United Nations Population Division's online database World Population Prospects, [www.esa.un.org/unpp/index.asp?panel=2](http://www.esa.un.org/unpp/index.asp?panel=2). Data downloaded on 7 August 2004.

The second major source of data on migrants is the Survey of Overseas Filipinos, a nationwide survey taken every year. The survey collects data on Filipinos who had left the country to work within the six-month period before the survey, or who had left before then but were visiting at the time of the survey. Unlike the POEA, the survey includes both registered and unregistered workers. Unfortunately, it does not collect information on marital status or numbers of children.<sup>11</sup> Data from the 2002 round of the survey are shown in Appendix Table 3.

<sup>11</sup> The design of the survey reflects its principal objective, which is to collect information on remittances. A description of the survey is available at the National Statistical Office website, [www.census.gov.ph/data/technotes/notesof.html](http://www.census.gov.ph/data/technotes/notesof.html).

**Appendix Table 3: Numbers of Filipinos working overseas, as measured by the 2002 Survey of Overseas Filipinos (thousands)**

Age	Male	Female	Total
15-19	2	6	8
20-24	35	79	114
25-29	111	137	248
30-34	83	98	181
35-39	90	69	159
40-44	95	52	147
45+	137	61	198
Total	554	502	1,056

*Note:* The Survey of Overseas Filipinos aims to capture only a subset of all overseas Filipinos: see the text for details.

*Source:* Data obtained from the table entitled ‘Number of Overseas Filipino Workers, by Age Group and by Sex’ on the National Statistical Organization website, [www.census.gov.ph/data/sectordata/2003/of0202.htm](http://www.census.gov.ph/data/sectordata/2003/of0202.htm). Data downloaded on 4 August 2004.

Experimentation with the deployment data from the POEA suggests that the estimates for stocks of temporary and irregular migrants are too high. The typical contract length for documented workers is two years. If, for simplicity, we assume that everyone’s contract is for two years, then, using the data in the ‘total’ column of Appendix Table 2, the stock of temporary migrants at the end of 2001 equals  $841,628+867,599=1,709,227$ . This is only about 55 per cent of the Commission on Overseas Filipinos estimate. Allowing for variability in contract length, but retaining the average length of two years, yields even lower estimates for the migrant stock at the end of 2001. Extending the average length of contract gives higher estimates. However, the average contract length would have to be an implausibly high 3.6-4.0 years to agree with the Commission on Overseas Filipinos estimate.

Similar experiments with the departure data from the Survey of Overseas Filipinos lead to similar conclusions. Assuming, for instance, that the average migrant visits home once every 1.5 years yields an estimate for the combined temporary and irregular stock of about three million. A figure of three million, or perhaps slightly more, is consistent with the POEA data (assuming, like the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, that there are two legal migrants for every illegal migrant), and is a reasonable basis for estimating numbers of children left behind.

How many children does the average migrant have? Appendix Table 4, drawing on data from the 1998 Demographic and Health Survey, shows average living children for women, by age. If migrant men and women in 2001 had the same numbers of children in each age group as the women in Appendix Table 4, then (using the age-structure data in Appendix Table 3) the average migrant would have 2.8 children. However, this figure includes children of all ages, such as the adult children of older migrants. It also ignores the possibility that migrants have fewer children than others. Allowance must also be made for double counting, since some children have

both parents away. To be conservative, it is probably safest to use a figure of 1-2 children per migrant, yielding a total of 3-6. It must be emphasized that this figure can only be treated as an order of magnitude.

**Appendix Table 4: Mean number of living children, women aged 15-49, Philippines 1998**

Age	Mean number of living children
15-19	0.07
20-24	0.65
25-29	1.67
30-34	2.69
35-39	3.47
40-44	3.81
45-49	4.28

*Source:* National Statistical Office (1998).

Has the number of children of migrants been increasing over time? The answer is almost certainly yes. As can be seen in Appendix Table 2, the annual number of POEA deployments increased by over 600,000 between 1984 and 2002. The average number of children per migrant has probably been trending downwards over the same period, but, given the slow rate of fertility decline in the Philippines, the fall in average children per migrant is very unlikely to have offset the increase in numbers of migrants.

### **The gender ratio of migrants**

Section 2.1.1 cites survey data implying the proportion of children with mothers overseas was slightly less than the proportion with fathers overseas. This seems, at first sight, to be inconsistent with widely-cited POEA data showing that in 2002, women accounted for 72 per cent of new land-based deployments, up from 50 per cent ten years earlier.<sup>12</sup> However, as Appendix Table 2 shows, land-based workers made up only 77 per cent of total deployments in 2002. Assuming that virtually all sea-based workers were men, the proportion of women among total new deployments was about 40 per cent in 1992, and 55 per cent in 2002.<sup>13</sup>

The 2002 Survey of Overseas Filipinos data shown in Appendix Table 3 imply that 48 per cent of departing workers were women, which is seven percentage points lower than the POEA-based estimate for the same year. The reasons for this discrepancy are not clear, but the Survey of Overseas Filipinos nevertheless provides

<sup>12</sup> Percentages taken from the table “Deployed New Hire Landbased Workers, by Sex” on the website of the POEA <http://www.poea.gov.ph/html/statistics.html>. Data downloaded on 5 August 2004.

<sup>13</sup> As can be seen from Appendix Table 2, 80% of all deployments were land-based and 20% were sea-based in 1992. Assuming that the same ratio applies to new deployments, and that 100% of new sea-based deployments are male, the percent of new deployments which were female was  $0.80 \times 0.50 + 0.20 \times 0.00 = 0.40$ . The calculations for 2002 are similar.

further support for survey finding that the ratio of absent mothers to absent fathers is approximately equal.

It is, nevertheless, plausible that the ratio of mothers to fathers is higher now than it was in the past, reflecting the rise in the ratio of female to male deployments.

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