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**INDEPENDENT CHILD MIGRANTS  
IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:  
UNEXPLORED LINKS IN MIGRATION  
AND DEVELOPMENT.**

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# **Independent Child Migrants in Developing Countries: Unexplored Links in Migration And Development**

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**Summary:** This paper focuses on independent migrant children, defined as below 18 years old, who choose to move from home and live at destinations without a parent or adult guardian. It summarises quantitative and qualitative research, and uses this to reflect on research agendas and global debates towards linking migration and development.

The paper surveys historical evidence on linkages between children's migration and societal development in earlier periods of modernisation, and identifies parallels to contemporary developing countries. The contemporary situation in developing countries is described in terms of: (1) numerical scale; (2) individual and family characteristics of the children involved; (3) decision-makers and decision-making processes in children's movements; (4) why it happens, including from children's viewpoints; (5) modes of movements; and (6) situations of children at destinations.

The paper considers the extent to which children may demand migration opportunities, and how this demand may be met partly with forms of movement specific to children. Research strategies are discussed to provide a bridge to development issues, including conceptualization of children's independent movements, children's labour migration, migration statistics and selection of who migrates. A final section draws on the review to reflect on global debates in child development and societal development

**Keywords:** child migrants, child poverty

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper reviews literature on independent child migration in developing countries. It defines independent child migrants as below 18 years old, who ‘choose’ (to a greater to lesser extent) to move from home, and live at destinations without a parent or adult guardian. It covers internal migration, and international migration from other developing countries. Around 40 studies with field evidence are reviewed.

The paper presents quantitative and qualitative evidence to describe the phenomenon in terms of: (1) its scale; (2) individual and family characteristics of the children involved; (3) decision-makers and decision-making processes that lead to children moving; (4) why it happens, including from children’s viewpoints; (5) modes of movements; and (6) situations of children at places of destinations. This shows that movements by children to live without parents or adult guardians is a major issue in developing countries, involving poor, rural children, in some cases as young as 7-10 years. Often it is motivated partly by the children themselves, with their own reasons, resources and mechanisms, inter-linked to family ones, to such an extent that many children’s independent movements would be difficult to consider adequately with a trafficking/ criminal lens, rather than a broader migration/ development lens.

Thus, the paper discusses development linkages with independent child migration in terms of: (1) linkages between child migration and stages of societal development in terms of macroeconomics, demographics and sociology of childhood (necessarily drawing on historical research, with inferences to contemporary developing countries); (2) research gaps that prevent greater inclusion of this group of migrants in global debates on migration and development, and (3) themes from development studies and rights-based migration to explore implications for the migrant children themselves, the people they leave behind and societies at destination.

Increasing research, debate and international motivation has focused on linking migration and development. Whilst this has recognized to some degree children with migrant parents or left behind by them, it has not included children who migrate independently. Until recently trafficking or asylum-seeking, rather than migration, were thought to account for most children’s independent movements. This automatically disqualifies from global debates any development issues independent child migrants may raise (whether from migration to development, or development to migration). The biological, social and legal distinctiveness of children and childhood suggest possible child-specific experiences as migrants, and responses to migration policies and processes, and combines with gender analysis in calling for greater differentiation across individuals in understanding migration-development linkages.

### **Stages of societal development (section 2)**

- A review of historical evidence on linkages between children’s migration and societal development in earlier periods of modernisation, identifies several parallels to contemporary developing countries. Historical records show independent child migration

internally, internationally and inter-continentially from impoverished parts of Europe to the Americas and other expanding colonies.

- Children's migration was linked to stages of societal development, structures of economic growth and population dynamics, and many similar mechanisms and factors remain relevant for contemporary developing countries.
- Prevailing notions of childhood gave rise to child-specific migration experiences, such as in financing migration, sector/ geographical distributions of migrant children's employment, and the role of children's migration in lifecycle smoothing.
- Every society has a notion of what childhood means. This not only distinguishes children from adults, but shapes what children do and what they are supposed to do. Constructions of childhood vary not only across societies at a given time, but at different stages of development. This is manifest in the child quantity-quality trade-off that drives fertility transitions and affects aggregate migration dynamics.

### **Quantitative evidence (section 3)**

- A review of survey-based evidence indicates the significance of independent child migration in its quantitative scale, migrant characteristics, and migration patterns. Surveys from Nepal, India, Burkina Faso, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Uganda, Mali, Ghana, Rwanda, Zambia, South Africa, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, El Salvador and Mexico – plus one cross-national study that included, amongst others, Argentina, Costa Rica and Kenya – offer evidence from varied sources, including: border-points, places of origins, rural and urban places of employment, informal sector, longitudinal tracking, and censuses.
- Mainstream data shaping migration-development debates fail to identify independent child migrants. There appears to be no official data collection effort on this group of migrants. Data exists on 'youth migration' but this blurs the lifestage issues between children and adults, and fails to reflect age-specific legal and social distinctions inherent in migration (such as age of employment, passports, and visas; duties under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, etc.).
- Estimates from academic and other research, include 30,000 independent child migrants from 22 Laotian villages; 100,000 in Benin; 121,000 in Nepal; 333,000 in Burkina Faso; and one million from two Indian states. Large proportions of street children, informal sector workers and fostered children are independent child migrants.
- Patterns of 'who' migrates are important for understanding vulnerabilities and resiliencies within migrant populations, and their development potentials. Girls, boys and young children are independent migrants. Several of the studies report substantial shares of 5-11 year olds. Most come from poor rural backgrounds, and family poverty is a major driver. Where children migrate to and what they do at destinations, are influenced by age and sex.
- The organisation of movement sometimes involves social networks, but not always. In many cases children recruit themselves into migration. Many keep contact with their families, and return home for visits. Several surveys found children in hardship at destination who nonetheless did not want to return home, but valued independence and the possibility of a better life.

#### **Qualitative evidence (section 4)**

Qualitative evidence is presented to assess whether children demand migration opportunities, and the partly child-specific ways the demand is met. In-depth, multiple sourced (children and adults), and highly contextual qualitative research has uncovered some of the decisions involved in children's independent migration. The paper focuses on decision-makers, financing of travel, arrangements for shelter at destination and planned activities at destination, as elements distinguishing migration.

Some children have independently decided to migrate, or have played a key role in the decision. Sometimes migration is entirely initiated and executed by children. There are substantial numbers of testimonies and case studies, from various contexts, that reveal children's participation in the process. Their visions of migration may be far different from reality, as is the case with many adult migrants.

Motives include: (1) consumption, family roles and intrahousehold positioning (within family livelihoods strategies); (2) accumulation of assets and human capital to pursue lifecycle transitions (as part of 'future seeking'); and 3/ responding to economic and health shocks and intra-family conflict (as part of self-protection). Independent migration can be valued for gaining *independence* itself, without abandoning family ties, since most seem not to be runaways; and important in this seems to be economic independence and its effects of strengthening intrahousehold positions.

Many migrant children are not seen as migrants, and instead non-migrant labels are used (e.g. fostered, street children, runaways, and early-married children), and this may partly explain their lack of recognition. Contrary to widespread perception children under 15 years can be motivators of their independent migration.

- Movement seems to occur mainly in two modes: (1) through the kinship network or other social mechanisms; (2) closely tied to labour-markets, following adult migrant flows and routes. Some cross over fences or rivers marking borders, some cross unchecked at official border points, and others over-stay day passes.
- At destinations, most work in some form or other. Many migrated for schooling, but generally it seems most are not in school, although some may be in some form of training. Many live with relatives or employers, but many do not receive the protection and support they are entitled to.
- Shelter, access to work, physical security and security of savings are important concerns. Children may be less able to change jobs than adults; may be less able to get documents even when eligible; may be more fearful of employer-violence or police involvement; and more easily cheated or robbed by employers and others
- Independence may mean that development programmes can be problematic for some children or viewed suspiciously; and repatriation of children may be unsuccessful for some.

## **Research gaps (section 5)**

Six research lines are suggested to strengthen understanding of links between migration and development:

1. *stronger conceptualisation of children's independent movements*, to clarify, for example, when it is migration and when it is child trafficking or other forms of independent movement
2. *more rounded and generalised evidence*; for example by developing larger-scale field-research, and collecting evidence on the positives as well as negatives of child migration;
3. *more inclusive statistics and methodology*, by learning from latest methodological experiences, because currently mainstream methods are unsuited to detecting child migrants;
4. *labour-market and economic analyses of children's migration for work*; by more explicitly including migration in research and debates on child labour;
5. *recognition of seasonality and temporal effects*;
6. *attention to endogeneity in independent child migration* – endogenous selection of individuals into migration can affect assessments of the impact of migration on children, and on poverty and inequality.

## **Conclusion (section 6)**

By giving voice to children and their families, research reviewed in the paper reveals the agency of some children in their independent movements and independent living. Being victims of crime and persecution explain many children's independent movements, but for many others they are not relevant and migration is more relevant. A conclusion from the review is the lack of attention in mainstream migration research to this group of migrants.

Quantitative evidence supports this view, showing that it is not a few families or particular cultures, nor restricted to boys or near-adult children, nor purely about subsistence activities. Many are seeking independence to enhance their intra-family positions and futures by being active family members (sometimes even when intra-family conflict had contributed to migration), and this differentiates some of them from 'runaways'. Even as children, most have to be, or seek to be, economic migrants to some extent; highlight their economic motives when asked; and appear to respond to economic factors.

Adult in purpose in many respects, including with families left behind, independent child migrants differ in their psychological attributes, knowledge, physical abilities, social status, and legal rights. Clearly this varies by children's ages, gender, backgrounds and individual differences. Independent migrant children may be significantly affected by the absence of protection and support from their families, and by the challenges of their new situations after migration.

Age, sex, lifestage and gender are key influences on migration-development linkages, by affecting who migrates, why, how and to where. The composition of the migrant population shapes its current human capital and its potential future human capital; its vulnerabilities and resiliencies to the challenges of migration; and its needs and responses to those needs. The literature reviewed provides strong evidence for seeking differentiated understandings of links between migration and development.

Children of given ages and sex tend to do certain types of work, and these are located in certain places; children's migration responds partly to this structure, and the structure itself depends on societal development (rural/urban inequality, labour/knowledge intensive production, poverty and livelihoods, human capital, size of informal sector, etc.). The effects are likely to be highly differentiated within childhood itself, between very young (e.g. to 11 years), young (12 to 14 years) and adolescent children (15 to 17). These are likely to interact with gender in different ways at different ages. Migrant children's work may be a key part of labour market transitions, argued in traditional migration-development theory.

Children's independent migration, located largely in informal sectors and irregular migration, may be a component of 'hidden' dimensions of urban poverty, and connect to development agendas on 'unregulated' urbanisation. Children's migration affects development agendas in poverty, child labour, street children and education for all. Poor and middle-income countries are destinations (more than OECD countries), and there may be issues to consider in their resources and capacities towards independent migrant children. The evident agency and desire of some children to use migration for their development purposes should be further explored in migration policies and child protection frameworks, recognising that as yet the kinds of required protection and support are not fully understood. It is suggested that part of the answer will be to seek a combination of information, law enforcement and social-economic investments in children.

There is a genuinely difficult nexus in identifying trafficked children and migrant children. Whilst the nexus is emphasised for children without parents, in reality an equally complex nexus exists for children moving with their families into exploitative situations at destinations (sometimes identical ones). In the family context, a migration/ development lens is mainly applied, but for independent children the main response has been to apply a trafficking/ anti-crime lens. An indispensable part of making headway on the nexus between trafficking and migration requires better understanding of children's independent movements with a development lens. This means understanding its development causes, and its development consequences, for the children involved, their places of origins and their places of destination.

The paper reviews evidence on children's independent migration, to describe it globally and differentiate it as migration; makes a first assessment of its development linkages at multiple levels of macro-structures, micro-processes and policy debates; and suggests research that would help clarify those linkages further.

# 1. MIGRATION, DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDREN

## 1.1 Introduction: global debate on migration

In recent years, there has been greater international focus on linking migration and development. It was the topic of inter-governmental dialogue at the UN General Assembly in 2003 and 2006, in Belgium in 2007, and in the Philippines in 2008.<sup>1</sup> The Global Migration Group coordinates UN regional commissions and 13 UN agencies on the topic.<sup>2</sup> Regional discussions have paralleled global discussions.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose is to maximise the benefits of migration, and minimise its drawbacks. Current debate is largely in the realms of broad links between migration and development, prioritising agendas and pursuing research topics, rather than specific policy instruments or government commitments. The focus so far has been on remittances; human capital effects and ‘brain drain’; and labour market regulation (UN 2008).

Involving high-level representation from both destination and origin countries, these processes are mapping issues for government engagement. Not only assessment of what is known, but also assessment of what *needs* to be known, is part of this process. As in the past in other aspects of managing globalisation, such as trade, this may influence what will be accepted as legitimate and illegitimate under calls for stronger systems of ‘managed migration’.<sup>4</sup> Within this are migrants’ human rights and the entitlements different societies are willing to guarantee outsiders.<sup>5</sup>

These debates have included children mainly in terms of children’s needs as dependents, when they are left behind by migrants or when in migrant families.<sup>6</sup> But the fact that many children are migrants who are substantially self-dependent, living without parents and adult guardians, is yet to gain attention. Instead, many children are depended upon by siblings, parents and grandparents whom they have left behind. Many have actively participated in their movements in ways that differentiate them from trafficked children. The development

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<sup>1</sup> *Global Forum on Migration and Development*, July 2007 (Brussels) and October 2008 (Manila).

<sup>2</sup> Notably UNICEF joined in November 2007, four years after the group’s creation, a reflection of the late positioning of children’s issues in migration debates.

<sup>3</sup> For example, 2008 saw the 13<sup>th</sup> annual *Regional Conference on Migration* involving vice-ministers from 16 countries in the Americas.

<sup>4</sup> “In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations... The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure... At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production... [and] lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure” (Marx 1977).

<sup>5</sup> The UN *Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families* offers some consensus on this, but with just 37 ratifications and accessions after 18 years (www.treaties.un.org, accessed 22 Sep 2008), nearly all by net-origin countries, it can be said that a broadly accepted normative framework on migrants’ rights is yet to be secured. Moreover it is unclear how far the convention considers children outside of families, the topic of this paper.

<sup>6</sup> Whilst this captures key issues, like effects on children of remittances, changed childcare and basic services, it omits how children may affect the destinations and timing of adult migration (even if they do not migrate themselves), and how children’s paid and unpaid work and their care-giving to family members, often helps make adult migration viable.

implications – for themselves and their communities – of this group of migrants have not been factored into global migration-development debates. There is little literature on independent child migration that directly engages with links to development; and little mainstream migration-development literature that even acknowledges the existence of independent child migration.

## 1.2 Children as migrants

The idea of unexplored links via children between migration and development stems from certain distinctions that may arise when children migrate. Independent child migrants are different from adult migrants. There are three essential reasons for this: children are biologically different in their physiology and psychology; children have accumulated fewer life experiences and knowledge; and childhood and adulthood are socially constructed differently.

Several potential implications can be outlined in the context of migration.

1. Children have special vulnerabilities and resiliencies, and so may be affected differently by migration.<sup>7</sup> Children have also age-specific responses to incentives and risks, and so may respond differently to a given migration policy or other influences on migration.<sup>8</sup> Children's capacity to claim their legal rights may also differ due to knowledge, experience and social position. Children's different physical, emotional and lifecycle needs may affect their 'reservation wages' (as unpaid or subsistence workers) and their choices of activities and motives as migrants (in terms of balancing their lower immediate consumption needs, with care and family needs, future-seeking and self-protection).<sup>9</sup>
2. Children are subject to particular legal and social norms, restrictions and expectations. The social construction of childhood parallels the social construction of gender (although obviously the content is different). It raises similar questions about differentiated effects of migration and migration policies, across persons and societies.
  - Whether children are expected to work and at what age, may affect their entry and terms of entry into work migration. Children's work may be related to perceptions of its age-appropriateness and lifecycle preparation, as well as poverty and poverty-shocks.
  - As minors, children have limited opportunities for documented migration. Yet they may have child-specific and society-variant means of movement (such as earning their livelihoods under arrangements of social fostering, informal apprenticeship or early marriage, which can have causes similar to adult labour migration).
  - At destination, legal minors who migrate may have limited *independent* access, without adult-involvement, to shelter (causing street living for some), livelihoods, healthcare and schooling.

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<sup>7</sup> For concepts of children's vulnerability and resilience, see Engle, Castle, and Menon (1996). Relevant to 'independent' children, Engle, Castle and Menon apply these concepts to show that children's well-being indicators are affected by different co-resident adults.

<sup>8</sup> Age-specific responses to incentives and risks have been studied with respect to sexual health, such as Yoddumnern-Attig et al. (2007) on migrant youth in several southeast Asian countries. Attitudes to risk can affect migration participation also (see Jaeger et al. 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Children's lower consumption needs is recognised in economic literature on poverty measurement, for example in terms of adult equivalence scales in determining poverty lines.

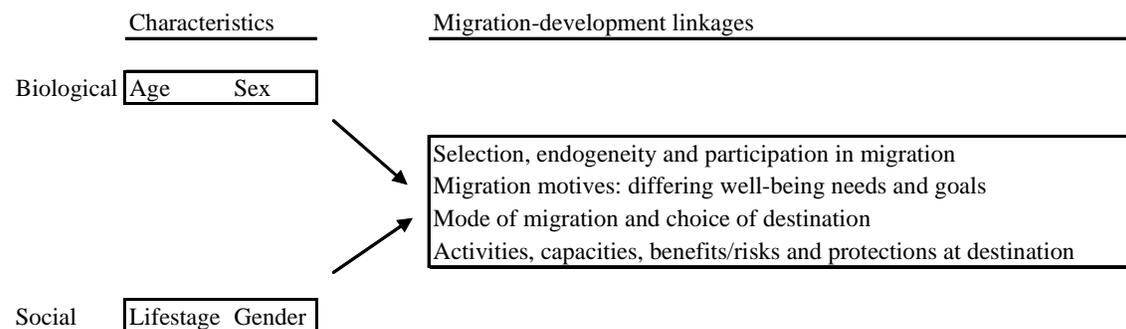
- As discussed later, notions of childhood can change over time and shift the child ‘quantity-quality trade-off’, and this can help drive demographic dynamics central in migration-development theories.

Constructions of childhood may be relevant in differentiating migration-development linkages at four levels: between adults and children; amongst children as they grow-up; across societies with differing notions of childhood; and over time as a given society changes its notion of childhood.

3. Children’s human development is unique within the lifecourse. What happens in childhood matters for adulthood, and often cannot be made up for completely in later life. Childhood is a foundational lifestage. This recognises the long-term role of childhood in *adult achievements* in incomes, family formation, healthiness, skills development, and other adult indicators (see Yaqub 2002). These ideas have been established using longitudinal data in research on the micro-foundations of economic growth and economic mobility, and link childhood development to societal development. Whilst this has been noted in reference to children in general (e.g. Sen 1999), it has not for migrant children in particular. Similar longitudinal processes over the lifecourse could shape long-run effects within migrant populations, affecting their rewards from migration, integration at places of destinations, and relationships and economic linkages to places of origins.<sup>10</sup>

Migration is not gender or lifestage-neutral. This is summarised in Figure 1. Age, sex, lifestage and gender can influence migration-development linkages, such as determining who migrates, why, how and to where. Female and child participation in migration; the shifting burdens of paid and unpaid work across household members; and the implications of relocated labour-market activity for reallocating consumption and family relationships, are some possible implications. Understanding these variations goes beyond simply applying sex- and age-breakdowns to migration data, and includes social relations underlying them. This paper considers these issues in relation to independent child migration.

**Figure 1: Children and migration-development linkages**



<sup>10</sup> This paper concentrates on contemporaneous and short-run effects of children’s independent migration, and leaves longitudinal issues to a forthcoming companion paper (a preliminary discussion is in Yaqub 2007).

### 1.3 Definition of independent child migrants

This review includes studies on populations who fall into the definitions below of ‘children’, ‘migration’ and ‘independent’. The term independent child migrant was not necessarily used by all, because relevant information exists within several child research topics, as well as migration research.

- Children are aged less than 18 years, following the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Additionally 12 and 15 years are relevant for international definitions on children’s work.<sup>11</sup>
- Migration is understood as a change in ‘usual residence’ (briefly defined as place of daily period of rest). This follows UN recommendations on migration statistics (UN 1978; UN 1998). International migration is a change in usual residence from one country to another, and internal migration is a change in usual residence from one civil division to another.<sup>12</sup> Similar to adult definitions, migration is understood as a chosen change in residence, different from trafficked or refugee movements. The definition excludes temporary travel for recreation, holiday, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimage. The paper includes seasonal migration. Alternative – and overlapping – definitions of migration exist based on citizenship or birthplace, although ‘usual residence’ is the criterion in much of the literature under review.
- Independent children are those living without a parent or legal/customary adult guardian.
  - The definition covers independence in travel and independence at destination. Children can migrate as one or other or both.<sup>13</sup> Media has tended to focus on dangers in independent travel, especially when undocumented or young.<sup>14</sup> Most research concerns independence at destination – this raises the more complex issues (although some cover travel, as reported).
  - The definition centres on relationships with co-resident or co-travelling adults, if any, and these relationships can differ from children’s actual care contexts (e.g. step-parents may act as guardians but not provide care).
  - The definition includes children with and without other relatives (apart from parents and adult guardians), referred to, respectively, as separated and unaccompanied

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<sup>11</sup> Following ILO conventions 138 and 182, children 15 years and older can work if it is not hazardous for their safety, physical or mental health, or moral development; and children 12-14 years old can perform certain types of light work a few hours per week. All other economically active children are termed as ‘child labourers’. Economic activity encompasses productive activities, except schooling and chores in the child’s own household, of at least one hour per week (whether for the market or not, paid or unpaid, casual or regular, or legal or illegal).

<sup>12</sup> According to UN (1978), the concept of internal migration has sometimes been restricted to movement that involves a change of locality or a certain distance, but change of locality is not readily amenable to objective measurement and distance is seldom recorded. Also internal migration statistics are tabulated for the administrative or political units into which a country is divided. Hence internal migration is operationally defined as a change of residence from one civil division to another.

<sup>13</sup> For a minority, independence in one might not imply the other. Children may be independent at destination after travelling with families, because of parental death, deportation or abandonment. Some cases have been noted of children independent from the border onwards. Also, children may travel independently but not be independent at destination, because their travel is for family reunification, such as when undocumented migrants cannot return to collect their children.

<sup>14</sup> See for example, ‘Children Highlight Migrants’ Desperation in Canary Islands Journey’ *Fox News* 30 May 2006; ‘Child migrants die in shipwreck’ *Adelaide Now* 28 Nov 2006; ‘Mexico says growing number of children found crossing border illegally’ *San Diego Union Tribune* 14 April 2006.

children.<sup>15</sup> The literature does not allow the two groups to be differentiated, and besides, children's contexts with relatives can be highly varied (sometimes better, and sometimes worse than unaccompanied children).

In summary, independent child migrants are children who have to some extent chosen to move their usual residence across a major internal or international boundary (often entailing movements from birthplace and/or country of citizenship); and live at destination without parents or legal/customary adult guardians, although possibly do so with relatives (like many adult migrants), and also possibly have travelled independently.

#### **1.4 Structure of the paper**

Section 2 reviews migration through a historical lens to explore potential macro-linkages that are as yet lacking in research on independent migrant children. It connects to societal development, industrialisation and demographic dynamics, all of which are highly relevant to current developing countries.

Section 3 presents evidence from large-sample surveys on children's independent migration in some 20 developing countries. The section discusses the scale and types of children's independent migration; and assesses its patterns in terms of age-structure, sex and other child and family characteristics. It shows children's rural-rural and rural-urban migration, both within countries and internationally.

Section 4 considers how far children 'demand' opportunities to migrate as agents of their own movement, and the channels through which this demand is met, given children's fewer opportunities to migrate. This considers children's origins, in which both the decision to migrate and the channel of migration are determined. The section also reviews evidence on children's situations at destination.

Section 5 considers research gaps: (1) need to conceptualise children's independent movements in ways that reflect existing evidence; (2) need for empirical research, particularly to round out some existing imbalances; (3) need to improve the statistical and methodological bases of current debates on migration-development linkages; 4/ need to understand migration and children's work; (5) need to consider seasonality and temporal issues; and 6/ need for more explicit account that migration may be a selective process, and implications of this for independent child migrants as individuals, and for poverty and inequality in communities they leave behind.

Section 6 draws on the review to suggest some development implications, at child and societal levels. In mainstream migration-development literature, the assumption seems to be that these are 'children', and the only issues their migration can raise is 'vulnerability' and 'protection needs'. Whilst important, and indeed child protection is necessary for development and is discussed, the section also reflects on broader issues for developing countries experiencing sizeable independent child migration.

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<sup>15</sup> See interagency report involving UNICEF, UNHCR and four international NGOs (Red Cross et al. 2004). For example, a migrant child domestic worker without a parent or legal/customary adult guardian in an adult relative's house is separated, but not unaccompanied.

## **2. CHILD MIGRATION AND STAGES OF (SOCIAL) DEVELOPMENT**

Children have been always involved in migration. Historical records show children migrated internally, internationally and inter-continentially from impoverished parts of Europe to the Americas and other expanding colonies. As is the case today, this was frequently within families or involved children left behind.<sup>16</sup> But also, children migrated independently.

The historical experience is instructive in showing how children's migration is linked to stages of societal development, economic growth and population dynamics, issues that have not been well explored in current literature. The historical experience parallels contemporary experience in developing countries in many ways.<sup>17</sup>

### **2.1 Links to macroeconomic and demographic transformations**

Grubb (2003) describes how children's work partly financed German emigration to colonial America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Children were auctioned, often into domestic service, whilst still at the docks. Nine to 13 year olds were the most valuable relative to the cost of their transport. The transatlantic passage cost between one-half and a whole year's income.

This parallels the relative costs of international documented migration for the poor in today's developing countries.<sup>18</sup> Even at that time, as it is today, children's migrant labour was sometimes tied to their education and training; and the extended family network helped some children escape the auction by being fostered by their American relatives.

Another issue of contemporary relevance is industrialisation and its influence on children's migration. This changed the structure of production, and hence the structure (and geographical location) of children's employment. In 19<sup>th</sup> century United States, important growth sectors were commercial agriculture (seen as male work), and urban-based manufacturing and domestic service (also suitable for females). Hammel et al. (1983) argue that this contributed to boys migrating to rural frontier areas and girls to urban areas. They note also that children's migration was both independent and as part of families, from abroad and internally. This occurred to such an extent that differences arose across the country in boy-girl sex-ratios, as shown in census data through the 1800s.

The transformation of the structure of production, and the associated labour movement, is central in classical migration-development theories, such as the Lewis model (Lewis 1954), the 'take-off model' (Rostow 1956) and the Harris-Todaro model (Harris and Todaro 1970). Rural-urban movement of people and capital was seen as the first stage in the 'East Asian

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<sup>16</sup> See for example, van Imhoff and Beets (2004) on children left behind by Dutch colonial administrators.

<sup>17</sup> An exception might be the state-sponsored independent child migration from Britain to various 'white' colonies, which existed on-and-off since around three centuries ago until the 1970s. As an Australian parliamentary enquiry into the most recent wave showed, some children were as young as four years olds, many were not orphans, and many were entered into labour (GoA 2001).

<sup>18</sup> For example, Mckenzie (2005) reports a recent survey that found in Burundi, Chad and DR Congo, a passport alone costs more than half the average national income, unaffordable to poorer households. This would be without factoring in additional documentation, visa costs, transport costs, time costs, bribes (sometimes multiples of official costs), and brokers' fees (paid by households lacking education, information or experience in negotiating officialdom).

miracle’ of newly industrialised countries (Lee 1972). What is very likely, though not well recognised, is that child migrants were part of these transformations.

The ‘gender literature’ on migration has highlighted how the changing structure of employment and growth across sectors can have sex-specific effects. In recent debates this has been argued to be partly responsible for the increasing ‘feminisation of migration’ (Piper and Yamanaka 2008).<sup>19</sup> But a similar possibility is not acknowledged for children’s migration, even though children’s work is often age-and-gender specific. As argued later, an important reason for this is an artificial separation of research fields in ‘child labour’ and ‘child migration’ in that there is no easily identifiable body of literature on ‘child labour migration’.<sup>20</sup>

Lifecycle dynamics is another contemporary issue with historical echoes. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands and Sweden, adolescents migrated independently – mainly internally – as a lifecycle step between leaving home and marriage (Kok 1997; Dribe and Lundh 2002). Migration was a route to the greater economic self-sufficiency necessary for marriage, particularly for rural landless youth. In Utrecht, between a third and a half of 12-26 year olds independently migrated to another province (Kok 1997). This supply of ‘young hands’ helped peasant households, without farming machinery, cope with their lifecycle dynamics, since families with young or no children took-in working adolescents from families with excess.

Child migration via the social practice of ‘informally fostering’ working children continues in many developing countries (as discussed later). Ethnographic research in contemporary developing countries suggests similar motives of migrant children around marriage and status. The historical perspective suggests this is partly how lifecycle dynamics – that of children, their families and their communities – impacts agrarian families dependent on manual labour for their livelihoods. Over a century ago, Seebom Rowntree’s analysis, *Poverty: A study of town life* (1901), showed how families are impoverished by unprotected lifecycle dynamics. Whilst the British welfare-state addressed this some 50 years later, unprotected lifecycle dynamics is still the norm in rural parts of developing countries.

## **2.2 Child ‘quantity-quality tradeoff’**

An over-arching insight, one that ties all the above discussion, is how children’s migration may be linked to notions of childhood. Adults are expected to look after themselves in ways, and through means, that children are not, and so notions of childhood are crucial to understanding links between children’s independent migration and societal development. Every society has a notion of what childhood means. This not only distinguishes children from adults, but shapes what children do and what they are supposed to do, conditional on sex and age. It may identify also duty bearers, either legally or socially, for the protection and promotion of children’s development, and influence the division of responsibilities for an

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<sup>19</sup> Paiewonsky (2007) suggests the term feminisation refers more to changes in patterns of female migration, rather than its share of the total (which is roughly the same as in 1960).

<sup>20</sup> For example, that economic globalisation affects migration and affects child labour is shown in separate research, but the implication that it may affect child migration by shifting labour demands and rewards has not been researched.

individual's well-being, between the state, communities, families, and the individual him/herself.

Of course notions of childhood are not fixed in time. As societies changed their notions of childhood, towards study, play and not work, *and* provided resources, institutions and laws to support those new notions, so it seems that children migrated less. Paping (2004) describes this transition unfolding in the Netherlands at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when children's migration declined partly due to rises in working-class real wages. Paping argues that although this meant lower family earnings in the short-run, children who stayed home experienced more upward social mobility over their lifetime.

Economists have studied changing notions of childhood, but with different terms. One of the most influential ideas, that strongly links to migration-development theories, has been that of the 'child quantity-quality tradeoff' (Becker 1993). This is the transition that has occurred with development in countries worldwide, and has led to societies with many children with low investments per child, to fewer children with higher investments per child. The basis of around 30 years of research, the idea has helped understand the social and economic logic of smaller families, greater investments in children's health and education, and reductions in children's work. This has brought focus to the causes of not only declining fertility, but also causes of qualitative improvements in childhood.

The connections to declining fertility are important because demographics drive theories on migration and development.<sup>21</sup> As summarised by de Haas (2005) migration is theorised to follow patterns: 1/ pre-modern societies with high fertility and mortality are characterised by limited circular migration; 2/ the early development stage sees a rapid decline in mortality, major population growth, and increased migration in all forms (circular, rural colonization frontiers, internal rural-urban, international); 3/ a third stage sees a major decline in fertility, rapidly decreasing international migration, still high rural-to-urban migration, and more complex circular movements; 4/ in the advanced stage, with fertility and mortality stabilized at low levels, the rural exodus significantly decreases, and migration is mainly residential mobility, urban-to-urban and circular, and in this phase countries become net destinations rather than origins.

Important also is the qualitative upgrading of childhood as the quantity-quality tradeoff proceeds. This is supposed to depend on families shifting from short-term survival to longer-term perspectives on childhood – precisely the kind of shift discussed by Paping in the Netherlands (cited above). Referring to contemporary developing countries, Kabeer (2000) argues this shift is part of implicit intergenerational contracts between parents and children over the lifecycle, and the terms of this can change – and be changed – in favour of children if the wider social and economic circumstances are right. In other words, such parental responses could be seen as social and economic micro-foundations for legal instruments, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other modern notions of childhood.

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<sup>21</sup> The fertility transition is when societies move from high to low fertility. It is supposed to have occurred in Western Europe and North America before the 20th century (Schultz 2001).

## 2.3 Summary

This section briefly reviewed child migration during industrialisation in Europe and North America, to understand contemporary debates.<sup>22</sup> Migration was part of economic and demographic dynamics in household survival strategies and longer-term development. Children participated in this, as both cause and effect. Three main conclusions for migration-development debates/ research can be drawn based on this review.

1. *Child-specific experiences.* The migration-development debate has not considered social constructions of childhood, in the way it has begun to do for gender. Nor has the debate much considered children's independent migration. The two omissions are connected. In the historical literature, notions of childhood gave rise to child-specific migration experiences, such as in financing migration, sector/geographical distributions of migrant children's employment, and the role of children's migration in lifecycle smoothing. Understanding how childhood is constructed would seem to help recognise (and understand) child migration.
2. *Conceptualising children's independent movements.* A notable feature of the historical literature is that it hardly mentions child trafficking. It identifies children in exploitative situations that would have been defined as trafficked under today's laws of child protection, but the literature does not section-off this movement into a separate category distinct from migration. This is a useful approach to conceptualise children's independent movements (whilst recognising the practical importance of a category of children's movements deemed illegal). In the modern context, children's independent migration is 'analytically unexpected'. This is an outcome of prevailing notions of childhood implicit in conceptualisations of migration, which universalise across highly varied economic and social realities.
3. *Dynamics in migration-development links.* Another insight from the longer-run perspective is the two-way relationship between migration and development. Development can affect migration, and vice versa. Constructions of childhood vary not only across societies at a given time, but at different stages of development. Migration is argued to be linked to fertility transitions, which result from changed parental valuation of children; and this suggests that direct investments in children could strengthen migration-development linkages. The importance of this potential pathway depends on the empirical extent of endogeneity of migration (being greater if migration is selective on children below their 'full potential').

Contemporary evidence on independent child migration is presented in Sections 3 and 4. This is used in Section 5 to revisit the above themes when considering research gaps, including conceptualisation of children's independent movements (using the contemporary evidence to suggest analytical approaches); identification of certain types of field-research to understand what aspects of migration are child-specific and what are more generalised; and consideration of endogeneity in children's independent migration, and its links to poverty and inequality.

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<sup>22</sup> For perspectives on migration patterns over the last 50 years and its possible effects on children's migration, see Kwankye et al. (2007) and Young (2004).

### 3. QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE ON INDEPENDENT CHILD MIGRATION

This section reports on the overall numbers of independent child migrants, and their individual and family characteristics. The section starts by considering official data. These are the main quantitative sources shaping migration-development debates. For reasons discussed, mainstream data are of limited value on independent child migration. The section then presents data from academic and other research. These indicate the scale in certain countries and localities, the involvement of young and poor children, attained schooling levels and gender composition.

The section highlights also data on children's migration motives, migration planning, travel and situations at destination. This previews qualitative evidence reported later on the same themes to understand children's agency in their movements, and is reinforced in the paper's concluding section when discussing the implications of children's movements for debates on trafficking and migration.

#### 3.1 Official data

Official data from governments and international organisations offer very little on independent child migration. The data weakness is systemic, and contributes to the low visibility of independent child migrants, including in official intergovernmental discussions on migration, and limits possibilities for analysing the development significance of their migration. The data weaknesses fall into four problems:

1. *Basic recognition problem.* Age-distributions of migrant populations do not distinguish independent and dependent children. There appears to be no concerted recognition at international levels, sufficient to influence on-going efforts to improve official migration statistics, that independent migration by children is a phenomenon in need of measurement.
2. *Comparability problem.* Age-distributions of migrant populations exist for many countries, but for many this is not easily located, and definitions vary. A global picture on the age-structure of migration is difficult to compile. The IOM's *World Migration Report 2005* does not, for example, report age-structure data; nor does the UN's databases on international migrant stocks or on urbanisation.<sup>23</sup> Even in relatively data-rich countries, the OECD's *Profile of Immigrant Populations in the 21st Century* in 2008, tabulates the age-distribution of immigrants aged 15 years and older, omitting children 0-14 years and making no distinction between children with and without parents or adult guardians.
3. *Aggregation problem.* Many sources publish data in five-year intervals common in population studies, and often include 18 and 19 year olds in an interval starting at 15. Perhaps worse is that often a 'youth' category aggregates data on adolescents and young adults. Wherever one chooses the line (18 years or elsewhere), adolescents are not the same as young adults. It seems important that migration data ought to approximate some of the age-specific legal and social distinctions inherent in migration (such as age of employment, passports, visas, etc.), and a youth category fails to do this, as do arbitrary five-year intervals.

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<sup>23</sup> See <http://esa.un.org/migration/index.asp?panel=1> and <http://esa.un.org/unup/index.asp>

4. *Lower-bound problem.* Often the lower bound, in terms of young children's participation, is assumed away by starting data at some arbitrary teenage (often at 15 years). Whilst young children's participation as independent migrants is expected to be relatively small, it is of prime policy interest wherever it occurs, and as the review below shows, is far from zero in some places.

Putting these limitations aside, it is worth noting that children *with and without parents* make up a large share of the migrant population, both internationally and internally. For example, two cross-national sources are:

- UN's World Youth Report 2007 gives shares of internal migrants in Latin America, and 5-19 year olds comprise at least 9 per cent in Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Venezuela (nine of the 12 countries presented).
- World Bank's World Development Report 2007, which gives data on 12-24 year olds in international migration; and depending on destination, their shares in flows of foreign-born immigrants are between 19 to 50 per cent (and 6 to 47 per cent of stocks).

In summary, mainstream migration data gives highly limited perspectives on children's independent migration, but could be improved with greater awareness and attention to definitions in data-generation.

### 3.2 Research sources

The following presents data from academic and other research. Evidence exists for Nepal, India, Burkina Faso, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Uganda, Mali, Ghana, Rwanda, Zambia, South Africa, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, El Salvador and Mexico – plus one cross-national study that included, amongst others, Argentina, Costa Rica and Kenya. Though few are truly nationally representative estimates (even if many are large sample-based), the data comes from varied types, sources and locations, including border-points, families of migrant children at places of origins, rural and urban places of employment, informal sector surveys, longitudinal tracking of children and national censuses, and this supports a collective picture of a sizable migration phenomenon by children.

#### Nepal

International migrant children were surveyed en route to India at five border checkpoints in Nepal in 2004 (Adhikari and Pradhan 2005).<sup>24</sup> Some 17,583 children were surveyed, 90 to 95 per cent of the outflow over three months.<sup>25</sup> Only 4 per cent of children carried any identification document (broadly defined).<sup>26</sup> About a quarter were aged 11-15 years, and half aged 16-17 years.<sup>27</sup> Boys comprised 87 per cent. Lowest and highest caste children were

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<sup>24</sup> Whilst Nepal is discussed here as an origin country, 2.7 per cent of its population is foreign born, of whom 11 per cent are aged 0-14 years (children 15-17 years were bracketed with adults in the reported data) (KC 2003).

<sup>25</sup> The authors noted this was a low flow period, due to various factors.

<sup>26</sup> This included citizenship cards; student cards; citizenship documents of fathers, brother or uncles; letter from the Village Development Committee; election cards; a certificate of some form; or a driver's licence. Of relevance is that in Nepal, just 34 per cent of under-5 year olds had their births registered (UNICEF 2005), and the cost of a passport is 26 per cent of per capita gross national income (McKenzie 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Children under 5 years comprised 18 per cent and aged 6-10 years comprised 9 per cent, suggesting that middle children increase migration costs for a family relative to their rewards as a migrant.

over-represented relative to the population. Half of those of school age had never attended school, and a quarter had completed primary school.<sup>28</sup>

Two-thirds appeared to be independent: half were not travelling with a parent or sibling, and 13 percent were alone. Around 2 percent said they had no other family members in Nepal. 13 percent were said to be travelling with uncles and neighbours. There was no way to verify these relationships, and enumerators doubted some. Only one percent of all children in the survey had any relatives in India (and family reunification was not cited as a reason for migration).

A third cited poverty as the reason for leaving. The majority of children said they were going for work (60 percent), with tourism, health checkups and schooling also cited. Around three-quarters of children going for work actually had particular types of jobs in mind, and 98 percent had in mind a particular state as the destination, both of which suggests some degree of calculated migration. A third had been to India before, so they knew first-hand some of the pluses and minuses. Some were seasonal migrants, but around a fifth planned to stay a year or more, and 40 percent did not have any timeframe to return.

Gurung (2001; 2004) argues children's migration is a regular feature in Nepal and indispensable for understanding children's work. Reviewing estimates, Gurung reports children working from around age six; a fifth of 5-9 year olds and three-fifths of 10-14 year olds economically active; 2.6 million economically active 5-14 year olds, of whom 8 percent are migrants; and an estimated 1.6 percent of 5-17 year olds away from home for over 6 months as internal migrant child labour, totalling 121,000, of whom 56 percent were boys. Sector studies indicate migrants constitute 97 percent of children in carpet factories, 95 percent of domestic servants, 94 percent of shoe shiners, 93 percent of porters, 75 percent of brick-makers, 64 percent of ragpickers, and 87 percent of transport workers. Importantly children's work is age-selective with, for example, 5-9 year olds being more able to do ragpicking than portering, thus potentially adding an age-selective effect to children's migration.

Citing six separate surveys, Gurung (2000; 2001) shows that poverty was the dominant reason for leaving home; being influenced by third parties was stated by 13-17 percent; and other reasons were parental suggestions, domestic problems, and personal preferences. Gurung argues land is a key driver, where 6 percent of the population owns nearly half the cultivated land, and feudal farming provides just 3 to 8 months of a family's annual food.

### **Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (India)**

A study in the Indian provinces of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh estimated one million children, 3 per cent of 5-14 year olds, reside away from their mothers (Edmonds and Salinger 2007). This compared data on living children against the household roster in a survey of 2250 households. The estimate counts independent migrant children in that it excludes children recorded in the survey as temporarily absent, and children whose mothers migrated, died or

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<sup>28</sup> The caste and schooling data suggests children with the best and worst indicators migrate more, which is opposite to what is believed to be for adults according to migration literature.

never married; also, no mother had all her children non-resident, suggesting children classed as migrants were genuinely so.

Rates of residing away were more or less steady between ages 8-13 years (and sloped upwards, both before and after). Children living away on average were 10 years old, a year older than mother-resident children; twice as likely to be boys; and more likely from asset-poor families. The strongest community-level correlates with children residing away were lower child wage rates and being less remotely located (such labour market effects appear also in qualitative research reported below).

### **Benin**

A similar method in Benin asked mothers on the whereabouts of their surviving children (Kielland 2008). All mothers in a random sample of rural households were surveyed regardless of their statuses in their households or relationships to household heads. Children whose mothers had died were reported upon by at least two other women.

This collected information on 13,324 children and adults aged 6-18 years, from 6,510 mothers in 4,722 rural households. The results indicate that 22 per cent of 6-16 year olds were independent migrants, translating into 100,000 children of that age-group nationwide. Mothers reported that 9 per cent had gone to work, 5 per cent to study, 2 per cent to marry and 6 per cent for 'other reasons'. Around half had migrated abroad, mostly boys (girls were mainly internal migrants). Boys were on average aged 11 years at departure, and girls 10 years.

Kielland models the probability of 6-18 year olds migrating independently for labour. In Benin, rural children's work is mainly in subsistence farming, cash crop farming, livestock herding, fetching water and petty trading. Whilst for girls local characteristics such as these appear to discourage staying home and increase their likelihood of migrating, they are uncorrelated with boys migrating – except the absence of piped water (and presumably other utilities) which seems to be a push factor. Close proximity of schools increases school participation; it also reduces boys' migration, but has no effect on girls' migration, which may reflect gendered access to education. Children of wealthier households are more likely to be in school and less likely to be migrants (particularly girls). Greater maternal education increases the likelihood of girls migrating (but has no effect on boys), and female headedness increases the likelihood of boys migrating (but has no effect on girls).

### **Burkina Faso**

In Burkina Faso, an estimated 330,000 children, 9.5 per cent of rural 6-17 year olds, migrated independently in 2001. This was based on a nationwide survey of 7,354 mothers on the whereabouts of their surviving children, with proxy reporting for children whose mothers had died (Kielland and Sanogo 2002). Less than one per cent of the migrant children were double-orphaned.

Around 30 per cent were reported to be in another rural area, 40 per cent in a city and 30 per cent abroad (with Côte d'Ivoire accounting for 22 percentage points). Whilst 11 per cent had a father who was a migrant, few were at the same destination. Of those said to have migrated

for work or ‘other reasons’, roughly a fifth left with a friend, another fifth with a stranger and the rest with a relative. Parents said 18 per cent of boys and 16 per cent of girls migrated entirely on their own initiative.

Strong gender differences in children’s migration were found. Whilst overall as many boys as girls were involved, girls were twice as likely to go to a rural destination.<sup>29</sup> Work (29 per cent of cases), study (26 per cent), marriage (15 per cent) and other reasons (30 per cent) were cited as migration motives. But girls were nearly 20 times more likely to go for marriage and boys nearly twice as likely for study. Noting that girls were more cited for ‘other reasons’, the authors suggest some labour migration by girls is hidden, such as for domestic work, because it is not culturally seen as work.

Children’s ages at migration depended on an interaction of migration motives and gender. Average age at departure was 11.2 years, with girls 8 months younger than boys.<sup>30</sup> Boys for work and girls for marriage were oldest, at over 13 years at departure. Boys were over a year older than girls when departing for work. Children who left for other reasons were the youngest (average 8.7 years). This possibly reflects a more socially complex type of movement for younger children, perhaps comprising a variety of informal fostering arrangements, and perhaps connected to more specific household shocks.

Whilst poverty was cited in half the cases as the cause, regression analysis suggested a complex picture involving individual, household and community characteristics. Children more likely to migrate were older, never went to school, had fathers who died (maternal death affected mainly girls), were from smaller families, and were less wealthy (mainly affecting girls’ internal migration). Being a biological child increased migration abroad by sons, and the authors suggest this is because of their greater likelihood to remit. Less remoteness, better transport and greater access to media are thought to increase children’s independent migration.

### **Côte d’Ivoire**

The finding above of large numbers of independent child migrants from Burkina Faso to Cote d’Ivoire is corroborated by a survey of 1500 cocoa farms across Cote d’Ivoire (IITA 2002). This estimates that nationally 22,240 children work in the sector, around 12,000 of whom are independent. Over three-quarters were migrants (57 per cent internal and 19 per cent international), and 58 per cent were living in households ethnically different from their own. Over one-third were enrolled in school.

The survey probed the recruitment process and these results are discussed in the next section. It is noted here that immigrant farmers (from surrounding countries) were somewhat more likely to have salaried children working on their farms (possibly indicating their greater need to use labour market mechanisms rather than family networks that may be more available to Ivorian farmers).

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<sup>29</sup> The data showed 40 per cent girls, compared to 20 per cent boys.

<sup>30</sup> Average age at survey was 13.4 years, with girls 7 months younger.

## **Tanzania**

Liviga and Mekacha (1998) is one of the few studies that surveyed at both destinations and origins. A survey of 250 male sellers of petty goods in Dar es Salaam, nearly all of whom were migrants, was followed by a survey in one province from where 30 originated. The surveys truncated at 15 year olds, and 11 per cent were 15-19 years old. Nearly all had completed primary schooling or more. 80 per cent had more than 6 family members.

Limited access to land or livelihoods was why the majority said they migrated. Over 93 per cent came from families in subsistence farming, 40 per cent considered land to be scarce in their places of origin, and just 1.6 per cent said non-agricultural employment was available.

Intrahousehold position was emphasised. Of 30 migrants surveyed in Dar es Salaam, 28 originated from zones facing land pressures from population and cash crop production. Though not in the least fertile or presumably poorest areas, the migrants themselves had little access to the better opportunities. Property relations dictated that older male adults controlled production and distribution within the family, whilst females and youth did the actual farming. Young males had little prospects of buying land since their labour was unpaid, nor of inheriting since average family size was 12.5 (over twice the national average), one-third were female-headed and 'borrowed' land, and nearly the rest were polygamous families.

Migration seemed to be a means of having independent income. This was reflected in the fact that nearly 60 per cent felt their migration was successful, despite one-third having no water or electricity, one-third said they did not eat enough, and four-fifths lived in rented rooms. Success was understood in terms of having regular income, the means to start a family and supporting relatives back home. Over a quarter considered themselves successful mainly because they managed their lives without parental help. Around 85 per cent sent money home. The independence aspect of independent migration was valued for itself. The historical evidence introduced this idea already, and supporting qualitative evidence is presented later, including independent ownership of certain socially meaningful possessions.

Kadonya et al. (2002) surveyed 157 children, mainly boys, working in the informal sector in Dar es Salaam, Arusha and Mwanza. Nearly 2 per cent were less than 10 years old, a third aged 10-13 years, and two-thirds were aged 14-17 years. Average daily earnings were US\$ 0.76, and ranged between US\$ 0.25 for under 10 year olds to nearly a dollar for 14-17 year olds.

Some 68 per cent of the children were internal migrants. Less than 5 per cent had migrated from home due to mistreatment; and nearly 17 had migrated for schooling or training but had ended up working. Nearly 45 per cent were living with at least one parent, over a fifth with a relative, and 12 per cent alone. Nearly 40 per cent selected by themselves their occupation (covering scavenging, garage work, fishing and quarrying), and a recruiter was not used by any.

## **Ethiopia**

Another large survey was conducted in Ethiopia. Erulkar et al. (2006) surveyed 1076 10-19 year olds in low-income zones of Addis Ababa, and found one-third were migrants who

arrived more than a year previously.<sup>31</sup> Around one-third migrated when younger than 10 years, 47 per cent between 10-14 years, and just under a fifth between 15-18 years. Only 17 per cent were living with their parents. Girl migrants were four times as likely as boys to be living without parents.

Most came from rural areas, but a large proportion (around 27 per cent) migrated from other towns. 50 per cent migrated for schooling opportunities, although some 13 per cent did not enter school. Nearly a quarter of girls said they migrated to escape early marriage, of which 60 per cent migrated aged 10-14, and none migrated with parents.<sup>32</sup> Death of a parent and family problems such as parental divorce were also commonly cited.

Compared to non-migrant children, migrant boys were twice as likely to be working and migrant girls 6 times more likely. Their earnings were some two-thirds of working non-migrants, even though migrants were slightly older on average. Girls who migrated to escape marriage were the most likely to be working and the least paid. Migrant children reported fewer friends, fewer sources of support and greater concerns about their safety. Domestic workers were nearly all migrants, over one-in-three of migrant girls (Erulkar and Mekbib 2007).

## **Uganda**

An ILO (2004) survey in Uganda of 433 children aged 5-17 years working in the urban informal sector found that around 40 per cent were not living with a parent and a fifth were heads of households. Occupations were gender and age differentiated. Nearly 63 per cent were migrants (including over 1 per cent international). Of child migrants, 70 per cent were aged 15-17 years, 28 per cent 10-14 years and 2 per cent 5-9 per cent. Of children under the ILO definition of child labour (rather than merely economically active), 80 per cent were away from home. Nearly 29 per cent worked for a relative and 54 per cent worked for a non-relative (others worked for parents).

In Young's (2004) survey of 273 children independently living and working on the streets in Kampala, nearly all were rural migrants rather than from the city's slums. Most were boys. Ages ranged from 8-17 years. In two large towns, also surveyed, street children were over 70 per cent migrants.

Many arrived through multiple migrations. Most attention has been on causes of children being on the street, rather than the migration that precedes it. Young also shows how macro changes in the past three decades altered the directions of children's migration.

## **Mali and Ghana**

Hatloy and Huser (2005) report surveys of street children "living separated from parents or other tutors, who slept on the streets the previous night" in Bamako (N=340) and Accra (N=1,341). In Bamako, around two-thirds were internal migrants and 16 per cent were

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<sup>31</sup> Aware that non-relatives are often omitted by survey respondents, the researchers included special questions on non-familial members and household employees.

<sup>32</sup> This suggests that for many girls who cannot migrate, the alternative is early marriage or opportunities for traffickers.

international migrants; in Accra, 97 per cent were internal migrants and under 1 per cent were international migrants.

In Bamako, 13 per cent were 6-11 years old, 41 per cent were 12-14 years old, and 46 per cent were 15-17 years old. The main reason for leaving home was money; but also mistreatment was cited by around a tenth. Around a third had been on the street for over a year, and a third had been there for less than 3 months. Only a tenth were double-orphans, and two-thirds kept contact with parents. Most were begging or working in services in the informal sector, with choice of activity being influenced by age and sex.

Average earnings the day before the survey of children aged over 11 years was around one US dollar (for 6-11 year olds, it was 90 cents). The authors compare this with an estimate that three-quarters of the population nationwide lived on less than a dollar day. Given lower consumption needs of children compared to adults, some children may be able to satisfy their immediate consumption needs through migration. However the authors note this is achieved forfeiting other needs, including shelter, fair work, healthcare, schooling, stability of earnings, and physical and emotional care.

Only a quarter of children said that life was better than at home; but also only a tenth said that they wished to actually return home. The majority (two-thirds) wished for a better job and 11 per cent wished for schooling. The authors suggest that this cautions against policies that force children to return home.

In Accra, 10 per cent were 6-11 years old, 27 per cent were 12-14 years old, and 63 per cent were 15-17 years old. Nearly all, irrespective of age, reported money as the reason for leaving home. Many said they were working towards some amounts of money or certain possessions (including for marriage), and would return afterwards. Half had been on the street for less than 3 months; and 14 per cent for over a year.

Half travelled to Accra with relatives or village members, 10 per cent with friends, and 40 per cent alone. A fifth of children 6-11 year olds and nearly a third of 12-13 year olds travelled alone. Travelling alone was 59 per cent amongst boys, and 34 per cent amongst girls. Hardly any involvement of recruiting agents or unknown adults was reported (11 of 1,331 cases).

Only 2 per cent were double-orphans, and nearly three-quarters were in contact with parents in the last year. Visits – rather than telephone, letter or oral messages – made up only 15 per cent, and this was slightly lower for 6-11 year olds (14 per cent) than for 16-17 year olds (17 per cent). This might reflect the greater independence and earnings of the older children.

Average earnings were 20,770 cedis (US\$ 2.33). As in Mali, there was a marked difference by age. The day before the survey, 6-11 year olds earned 11,508 cedis (N=128), 12 and 13 year olds earned 16,219 cedis (N=196), 14 and 15 year olds earned 17,349 cedis (N=400) and 16 and 17 year olds earned 26,784 cedis (N=573). In comparison, the authors report that daily per capita expenditure in Ghana ranged between 3,367 cedis and 16,667 cedis.

Three-quarters of the children said they saved in informal savings schemes, 16 per cent spent their money themselves, and 8 per cent gave their money to others. Younger children appeared to have less control over their money.

Similar to the Mali results, whilst only 27 per cent said life on the streets was better than at home – and older children and boys were more satisfied – going home was wished by 23 per cent and getting a better job by 46 per cent and going to school by 18 per cent.

### **Zambia**

A large survey of 1,150 street working children in Lusaka found that one-third were 15-17 years old, 40 per cent 12-14 years old and 27 per cent 4-11 years old. (Lemba 2002). A quarter of the surveyed children were migrants, including nearly 2 per cent from neighbouring countries. Fewer than 30 per cent spent the night on the streets, and half had been street working for less than two years. Relatively few were orphans with 78 per cent with a surviving parent, and another 12 per cent having a close relative. Yet a third were residing with non-relatives or alone (43 per cent were with one or both parents). Half cited work, money and helping family as to why they were street working, 5 per cent cited poverty, 5 per cent family abuse and 15 per cent friends. Daily earnings were under US\$ 1.10 for 42 per cent of children and between US\$ 1.10 and 2.90 for 22 per cent. Girls earned more, mainly because average earnings in prostitution were four times other activities. Returning to school was cited by 70 per cent as help most wanted; capital to start a business or employment by 13 per cent; housing, food or clothes by over 8 per cent; money for repatriation by 1 per cent and assistance reconciling with parents by nearly 1 per cent.

### **Rwanda**

In 1998, Veale and Dona (2003) surveyed 290 street children in Kigali and three largest towns, of whom 91 per cent were boys and 53 per cent were aged under 15 years. Despite the genocide of 1994, 61 per cent had at least one living parent whose whereabouts was known. Around 65 per cent were migrants (with much larger shares in towns). 42 per cent reported living with one or both parents, 9 per cent a sibling (but whether the sibling was adult was not stated), and 16 per cent a relative, neighbour or friend (not stated if adult). Far fewer girls slept on the streets. The authors found that compared to non-migrant children, migrants were statistically more likely to be sleeping on the streets, out of school, and reporting nightmares. For reasons for being on the street, nearly 46 per cent cited poverty or economic motives; 17 per cent family disharmony; and 27 per cent parental death, parental remarriage, or loss of parents.

### **South Africa**

A longitudinal study with surveys every 4-6 months in one rural district in one province in South Africa recorded 39,163 episodes of children's migration over two years (Ford and Hosegood 2005). The district has one of the highest HIV rates nationally. This captured all episodes of out/in-migration, what the origin or destination was, and whether the migration was accompanied.

Around 21 per cent of children migrated, and over 80 per cent did so independently. Around 60 per cent migrated out of the district. Children in households with more assets were less likely to migrate.

Having a resident parent lowered the chances of a child's migration. In the first survey wave, one-third of children were not resident with a parent, and 1.4 per cent were double-orphaned. Death of the mother increased the chances of a child's migration, unless death was due to AIDS, in which case it lowered the chances of migration. Father's death increased migration, whether due to AIDS or not.

### **Mekong region**

A few surveys in the Mekong region in southeast Asia together show views from origins and destinations. Phetsiriseng (2003) reports a survey in Laos of three provinces bordering Thailand (N=1614 households). Migration is centuries old in this area, with the same ethnic groups on both sides of the 1730 km border, and Thai and Laos languages have similarities.

One-third of migrants from 22 villages, were independent migrant children, some 30,000 children. Presenting data and views of immigration and social welfare officials in those provinces, Phetsiriseng argues that between half and three-quarters of undocumented migrant workers may be under 18 years in some places. Villagers mentioned parents trying to stop their children migrating, but most left anyway, and many were said to be aware of the risks but trusted their luck and social networks.

Cycles of repatriation and remigration are common in this area. In six months in 2000, the Thai government repatriated 150,000 Laotians, aged 14 to 24 years, more than 70 per cent of whom had been repatriated three times. Girls made up more than half. Some district officials experimented with penalising families with independent migrant children, but this has been abandoned. A local official reported the case of four boys repatriated from Thailand, who an international agency supported in vocational training in motorcycle repair in Laos, but who after graduating re-migrated undocumented to Thailand with their new skills.

Lack of jobs and schooling was reported in the village surveys to be a major push factor, with three-quarters of the labour force in subsistence farming, and nearly half the girls and a third of the boys, aged 6-16 years, not attending school. Established smuggling networks, peers migrating, electricity/TV, poverty, and proximity to Thailand were other factors. Some villages had mobile phones to contact smugglers.

Seasonal migration between rice planting and harvesting remains important, but villagers reported that children increasingly preferred to migrate to avoid the planting work (and return for festivals). Additionally, Phetsiriseng argues children may prefer migrant work because they may have more control of the income than on a family farm.

ILO (2005) reports a survey of 163 10-17 year olds in 31 villages in a Cambodian province bordering Thailand, that found over half were not in school and 36 per cent were working (half of whom were 10-14 years old). Amongst currently or previously working children, nearly a quarter of 10-14 year olds, and half of 15-17 year olds, worked outside the village.

Most went to Thailand, with working 10-14 year olds at roughly the same rate as working 15-17 year olds. All children working outside the village were independent migrants. Lack of food was the primary reason given for why someone in the family migrated, with 85 per cent of households saying they did not have enough rice for everybody for all the year.

A survey in 2005 of 313 child migrants in Mae Sot, a rapidly industrialising Thai town close to the Myanmar border, included mainly over 15 year olds, although the youngest was 12 (FTUB 2006). Around 70 per cent of mothers and 65 per cent of fathers remained in Myanmar. Just 12 per cent of migrant children lived with a parent. One-third lived at the workplace (often a condition of employment).<sup>33</sup>

Around 85 per cent cited an economic motive for being in Thailand. Almost all had completed at least primary school, but only a few continued schooling in Thailand, and half said work, costs or opportunity prevented it (only a fifth said they did not want to study).

The children originated from all over Myanmar, some as far as provinces bordering Bangladesh on the other side. Around 60 per cent had arrived within 12 months, suggesting a high turnover, which is argued to help keep wages low. Despite harsh working conditions, around 60 per cent said they liked living in Thailand, and around the same number said they would like to return to Myanmar.

Immigration was documented in two-thirds of cases, mainly using a one-day pass that was subsequently over-stayed (thus reducing the use of hazardous routes). Over 90 per cent travelled with trusted people, such as parents, relatives or friends, suggesting the actual journey might be often safer than presumed. This particular crossing is easy terrain, explaining why very few paid a smuggler, and the cost of migration in 80 per cent of cases was zero or low (under US\$ 2). Lower migration costs meant that families could come, and many were 'left behind' in Thailand directly after the border. The report gives data that travel costs from the border within Thailand can be quite high. The authors argue that migrant vulnerability is a function of not only immigration documentation, but also the financing and debts of the migration (which would apply to internal migrants too).

## **El Salvador**

Citing a national estimate of 350,175 working children in 1998 in El Salvador, Quiteno and Rivas (2002) surveyed 110 working children in the three largest cities, of whom two-thirds were boys, and 19 per cent were aged 16-17 years, 36 per cent 13-15 years, and 45 per cent were aged 7-12 years. Around 41 per cent of the children were migrants, with nearly a third having moved less than five years previously. Nearly a third of migrant working children said they lived with different family members before migrating. Around 36 per cent were living with both parents, 55 per cent with one parent and nine per cent with neither parent. Parents were cited as their reason for working by 8 per cent, wanting to help the family by 23 per cent, wanting to earn money by 63 per cent and survival-needs by 5 per cent. Half the children said they spent the money on themselves and 22 per cent gave the money to co-

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<sup>33</sup> The link between employment and housing was raised also in Pearson et al. (2006) and Iversen (2002). It is an effective tool of control for employers. A lack of market-based housing options may increase migrant children's vulnerability.

resident family members. Daily earnings were below US\$ 3 for 33 per cent of children, US\$ 3-6 for 40 per cent, and US\$ 6-12 for 9 per cent.

## **Mexico**

Most attention has been on Mexico as a migrant source or transit country to the USA. However Mexico is a major destination as well. Agricultural production in Mexico depends on both international and internal migration, and involves children. Rural-rural migration across Mexico's 1000 km southern border sustains a range of fruit and other production.

Sin Fronteras (2005) estimate 10 per cent of agricultural migrants are 14-17 years old, mostly boys. Younger children are involved – Sin Fronteras cites official Guatemalan statistics on independent Guatemalan children repatriated from Mexico, and around 1.5 per cent were below 11 years old and nearly 23 per cent aged 11-15 years (April 2004 – April 2005). Artola (2007) cites official Mexican data for January to July 2007 that 15 per cent of children with and without families repatriated to Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua, were under 12 years old.

Romero et al. (2006) reports on several large surveys on Mexico's internal migration for agriculture. Of around 3.1 million agricultural wage workers, half are migrant and a fifth children. Whilst mostly with families, around one per cent of agricultural wage workers were migrant and independent under 14 year olds. Two-thirds of migrant household heads said they first started migrant work aged 16 years or younger. Around 58 per cent of migrant children under 6-14 years worked, of which: 1.2 per cent were alone, 66 per cent were with both parents, 14 per cent were with one parent, and others were with village members. All independent migrant children worked, compared to 53 per cent when with both parents. Of those with one parent, 57 per cent worked if only with the mother and 68 per cent if only with the father.

## **Cross-national census study**

One of the few cross-national quantitative studies is McKenzie (2008). This estimated children's international migration using large samples drawn from censuses from 12 countries. The definition of migration was restricted to: (1) foreign-born international migrants; (2) flows that arrived in recent five-, two- or one-year periods (depending on the country); 3/ migrants originating from developing countries with gross national income per capita below US\$11,116 in 2006.

The data shows that in recent flows large proportions of migrant children live without a parent at destination. This ranges from 5-82 per cent of girls and 7-75 per cent of boys, as shown in Table 1. The unweighted average across countries was 25 per cent of 12-14 year old girls, 49 per cent of 15-17 year old girls, 21 per cent of 12-14 year old boys, and 46 per cent of 15-17 year old boys. The high proportion amongst girls aged 15-17 years in several countries was related to marriage, but this does not apply in all countries and the net-of-marriage figures remain high.

**Table 1: Flow of child migrants from developing countries: % living without a parent at destination and % married**

<b>GIRLS</b>					
<b>Destination</b>	<b>Flow...</b>	<b>Living without a parent, %</b>		<b>Married, %</b>	
		<b>12-14 y olds</b>	<b>15-17 y olds</b>	<b>12-14 y olds</b>	<b>15-17 y olds</b>
Argentina	1996-2001	19	50	n.a.	2
Canada	1999-2001	7	13	n.a.	2
Costa Rica	1998-2000	31	60	3	29
Greece	1999-2001	14	41	2	19
Ivory Coast	1997-2002	55	82	5	41
Kenya	1998-1999	34	52	2	12
Mexico	1995-2000	25	48	2	14
Portugal	2000-2001	29	42	0	6
South Africa	1999-2001	41	66	0	11
Spain	1999-2001	19	34	0	7
United Kingdom	2000-2001	5	61	0	5
United States	1998-2000	17	39	n.a.	10

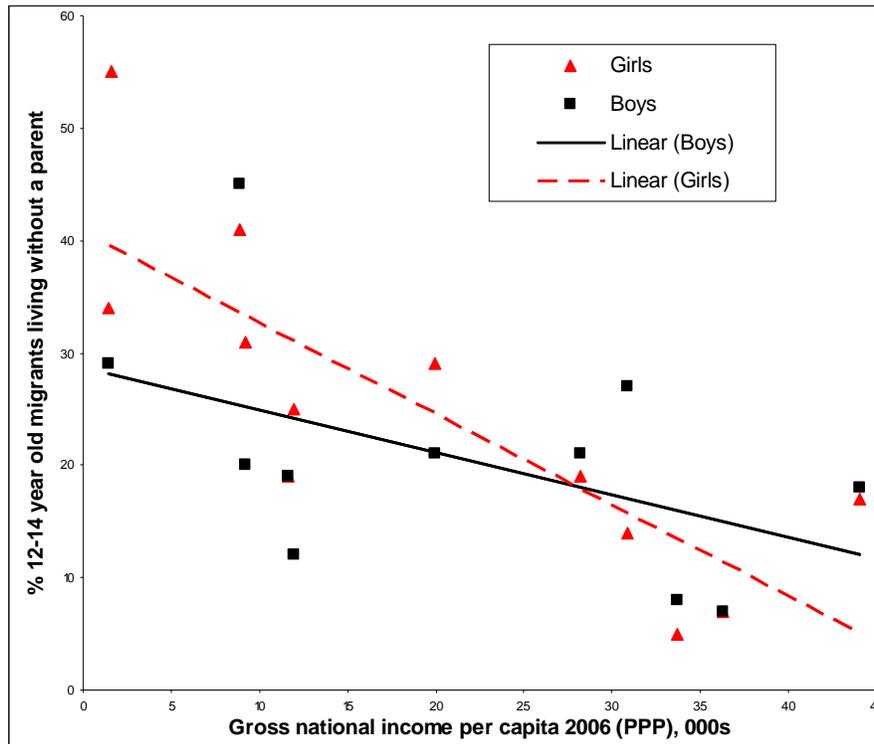
<b>BOYS</b>					
<b>Destination</b>	<b>Flow...</b>	<b>Living without a parent, %</b>		<b>Married, %</b>	
		<b>12-14 y olds</b>	<b>15-17 y olds</b>	<b>12-14 y olds</b>	<b>15-17 y olds</b>
Argentina	1996-2001	19	35	n.a.	1
Canada	1999-2001	7	7	n.a.	0
Costa Rica	1998-2000	20	49	1	5
Greece	1999-2001	27	60	0	1
Ivory Coast	1997-2002	s.s	67	s.s.	3
Kenya	1998-1999	29	47	0	3
Mexico	1995-2000	12	29	0	2
Portugal	2000-2001	21	50	0	2
South Africa	1999-2001	45	75	0	3
Spain	1999-2001	21	30	0	2
United Kingdom	2000-2001	8	58	0	2
United States	1998-2000	18	49	n.a.	4

Source: McKenzie (2008)

Note: s.s. means small sample size, and n.a. means not available

Crucially, of the 12-14 year old migrants, the proportion living without a parent was higher in poorer destination countries, as shown in Figure 2. This is likely due to richer countries having greater barriers to migration and children's work. It was more pronounced for girls than boys. The correlation would be stronger than shown to the extent that some children's undocumented migration is not captured in the data; children's undocumented migration is larger in poorer countries; and internal migration has not been included.

**Figure 2: Per cent of migrant flows aged 12-14 years without a parent at destination versus gross national income per capita**



Source: McKenzie (2008) and World Bank World Development Indicators (2007).

### Secondary sources

Several studies cited data from other sources, or reported only basic statistics. These are collected below:

- Morocco: around half the irregular migrants in Morocco from sub-Saharan Africa were 15-25 year olds (Barros et al. 2002).
- Ghana Child Labour Survey 2001 showed 55 per cent of street children are migrants (Kwankye et al. 2007).
- India: of around 5000 independent child workers contacted by a Mumbai NGO between 2001 and 2003, nearly all were migrants and over half were under 12 years old (Edmonds and Salinger 2007).
- Philippines: Official statistics suggest some 400,000 children aged 5-17 years live and work away from home in the Philippines, of which 9 per cent are in domestic service (Camacho 2006).
- Mexico: a survey of migrant shelters in border areas found 40 per cent were aged 14-17 years old (Sin Fronteras 2005).

### 3.3 Return child migrants

A number of studies have surveyed return child migrants at origins. These add temporal information by reporting children's retrospective views on migration, and their re-migration intentions. Previewing the next section, the data suggests that many children are not naive

about migration and its pros and cons. Many indicate their experiences have influenced how they would re-migrate.

Adhikan and Pradhan (2005) cited above also surveyed 8,210 Nepali children returning from India, over a period of two months. Sex-structure, ages and reasons for leaving Nepal were roughly the same as outgoing children (discussed above). Half had migrated for work. Nearly three-quarters had stayed a year or more.

Importantly, a quarter of children intended to migrate to India again within two months, another quarter within a year, and 50 per cent were unsure if they would re-migrate. One-third had worked as day labourers, especially in construction, and over a quarter worked in hotels, restaurants and as porters. Around a tenth reported they studied in India, and nearly all of these children had planned to do so when they migrated.

ILO (2005) interviewed 72 returned migrants in Cambodia (excluding cross-border commuters). Half had returned from bordering provinces in Thailand, and another half from further inside Thailand. Over a fifth reported having first migrated as a child.<sup>34</sup> Two-thirds had worked in agriculture. Positives of migration were income, work, living conditions and benefits (56 per cent), food security (5 per cent) and new skills (6 per cent). Negatives were being arrested, low pay, work conditions, missing family and being disrespected.<sup>35</sup>

Nearly a quarter judged migration to have had a positive impact on their life, 15 per cent mixed impact, and 14 per cent negative. All intended to re-migrate. Only one-third said their return home was to visit family, while others cited problems with employers, police, health, unemployment or marriage/childbirth. When asked about what dangers they might encounter in re-migration (having had migration experience), 45 per cent cited arrest (to which 35 per cent said they would travel through the jungle to avoid detection), and 18 per cent feared being cheated, robbed, killed or health problems (but only 3 per cent said they would approach police or organisations if in trouble).

Iversen (2002) studied independent child migration in India. The results are discussed later, but at this point an overlap is noted with the Cambodian study above, and the discussion on lifecycle effects in the previous section. Iversen argues puberty and marriage are reasons for return migration of girls. Moreover, girls are relatively more in domestic service and cannot change employer as easily at destination, and so workplace problems may be another reason for their return home.

Venkateswarlu (2007) describes two contrasting cases of migration by boys (12 and 14 years old) from Rajasthan to Gujarat for cotton cultivation. A labour recruiter was involved and the work was hard in both cases. In one case, the boy's father was party to the migration and

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<sup>34</sup> As a whole, over two-thirds said they decided themselves to migrate (data was not reported specifically for those who migrated as children). Parents and relatives were cited by 11 per cent and intermediaries by 16 per cent. Two-thirds migrated on foot, a quarter by bus, and a fifth travelled alone. Nearly a third located work themselves, and another third used an agency or intermediary. Whilst over half trusted the person finding them a job, nearly a fifth did not at the time. Nearly two-thirds were paid less than what they were promised. Two-thirds sent remittances.

<sup>35</sup> Income generation, debt and other economic motives were cited by 77 per cent. Following friends was cited by 10 per cent, and new experiences and seeing a modern place by 11 per cent.

received payment, and the boy had been migrating for several years and the migration was circular over a year. In another case, the boy migrated with two friends without parental knowledge, and after abuse and non-payment, all three escaped and returned home, a difficult journey of three days without food. Worth noting for this sector, is that under 14 year olds substantially out-numbered 15-17 year olds, and girls made up roughly two-thirds (based on 430 farms across four states).

Interviews in rural Ghana found a complex picture of attitudes around migrant children who return home (Beauchemin 1999). Some return successful with goods and money. Others are seen to return home with problems, like debt, sexual diseases, babies, and challenges to traditional customs. Some returnees find themselves caught between two cultures. Illegitimate children at destination may be another barrier to return.

Dezso et al. (2005) cite similar issues in Oas, Romania (N=500).<sup>36</sup> Some said it is hard for returnee child migrants to readjust to modest living conditions after earning more abroad, and so want to go abroad again. On the other hand, Dezso et al. cite a child's letter sent to his family from abroad saying that he would like to come home because he is tired of hard conditions, loneliness, and homesickness. When interviewed as returnees, children recalled similar experiences.

### **3.4 Summary**

Mainstream statistics shaping migration-development debates fail to report on independent child migration. Research sources, although providing a great deal of interesting data, do not directly explore development.

The evidence available allows conclusions on two issues: 1/ the scale of children's independent migration indicates a huge phenomenon in poor and middle-income countries, with many being both origins and destinations; and 2/ reported migrant characteristics, particularly on age and gender, are important for understanding strengths and weaknesses of migrant populations. The review shows girls, boys, young children and older-adolescents are independent migrants.

The more scattered data reported on earnings/savings, assets at origins, schooling attainments, poverty-backgrounds and migration motives are some determinants of whether migration is beneficial for individuals and communities. Origins are overwhelmingly rural, and consequently some literature made linkages to land inequality and subsistence farming, issues with long-standing development concerns. Many are economic migrants, and poverty and employment was cited in most studies.

### **Magnitudes**

Given the data reviewed, it would not be unreasonable to think the global scale of children's independent migration may run into the tens of millions, whilst also underlining that the evidence is drawn from different sources and may be not comparable. Estimates reported

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<sup>36</sup> The authors report the topic was hard to openly discuss, and this set of questions in the survey held the highest no-answer rate (14.5% said 'I don't know or I won't answer').

were 30,000 independent child migrants from 22 Laotian villages; 100,000 in Benin; 121,000 in Nepal; 300,000 in Burkina Faso; and one million from two Indian states. In Argentina, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Mexico and South Africa, between 12 and 82 per cent of migrant children are without a parent at destination. Surveys show large proportions of working children and street children are migrants – in some employment sectors overwhelmingly so, but generally proportions over two-thirds have been reported in many places.

### **Geography of age and gender**

Table 2 summarises some age and gender evidence. Under 15 year olds were noted in most studies, and it might be surmised a third or more are in this age group. Gender plays a role, probably interacting with age, particularly by adolescence, and is seen to affect employment choices (and possibly also schooling linked to migration – see Burkina Faso results).

Children of given ages and gender tend to do certain types of work, these are located in certain places, and migrant children appear to respond to this structure to some extent. Recalling earlier discussion on stages of development, this suggests the underlying structural drivers of children's migration are connected to economics and demographics, in ways similar to how migration studies have approached adult labour relocation, for example, from rural surplus to higher-demand areas.

Links between migrant characteristics and migration patterns have been researched. Curran et al. (2005) found gendered-effects in migration to three distinct destinations in Thailand: a primarily agricultural wage labourer market, a city and its surrounding suburbs; and an export processing zone. The authors argue there are significantly different migration patterns linking sex, destination and place of origin. Gurun (2000) situates children's migration in Nepal within modernisation and its effects on economic production and family relationships.

**Table 2: Summary of quantitative evidence on age and gender**

Location	Under 15 year olds	Gender effects	Source
Accra, Ghana	Street children: 37 percent aged 6-14 years; 97 percent migrants	Type of work depends on age and sex	Hatloy and Huser 2005
Bamako, Mali	Street children: 54 percent aged 6-14; four-fifths migrants	Type of work depends on age and sex	Hatloy and Huser 2005
Banteay Meanchey, Cambodia	Working children: nearly a quarter of 10-14 year olds, and half of 15-17 year olds, worked outside the village, mostly migrants in Thailand		
Benin	22 percent of 6-16 year olds were independent migrants. Boys on average aged 11 years at departure, and girls 10 years		Kielland 2008
Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, India	One million 5-14 year olds reside away from their mothers - average age 10 years	Boys living away from mothers twice as likely as girls	Edmonds and Salinger 2007
Burkina Faso	Average age at departure 11.2 years, with girls 8 months younger than boys. Children who left for reasons other than work, school or marriage were youngest (average age 8.7 years)	Overall as many boys as girls involved. Girls twice as likely to go to a rural destination	Kielland and Sanogo 2002
El Salvador	Urban working children: 45 percent aged 7-12 years; two-fifths were migrants		Quiteno and Rivas 2002
Ethiopia	Child migrants: one-third migrated aged under 10 years, 47 percent 10-14 years, and under a fifth 15-18 years. Only 17 percent living with parents.	Compared to non-migrant children, migrant boys twice as likely to work and migrant girls 6 times as likely. Quarter of girls migrated to escape marriage, of whom 60 percent migrated aged 10-14, and none migrated with parents.	Erulkar et al. 2006
Mexico	Migrant agricultural wage families: 58 percent of 6-14 year olds worked, of which a fifth were living without a parent		Romero et al. 2006
Nepal	Child migrants: a quarter aged 11-15 years; two-thirds independent migrants	Boys comprised 87 percent of surveyed children	Adhikari and Pradhan 2005
Tanzania	Working children: a third aged under 13 years; 68 percent internal migrants; 55 percent living without a parent		Kadonya et al. 2002
Uganda	Child migrants: 30 percent aged under 14 years; 40 percent living without a parent	Type of work depends on age and sex	ILO 2004
Zambia	Street children: two-thirds aged under 15; quarter were migrants		Lemba 2002

Generalisation of existing evidence is difficult, but is attempted on the basis of the above rationale. Age, sex and destinations might be linked, and used to suggest some general patterns, cutting across internal and international migration.

- In rural-rural migration: boys can go into farming and plantations; girls migrate less to rural destinations, but do so under social practices such as informal fostering and early marriage (escape from marriage usually seems to lead to urban destinations).
- In rural-urban migration: boys are more likely to migrate onto urban streets than girls (except girls in prostitution); girls and young boys go into domestic service; boys and girls go into manufacturing, but the jobs may be gendered; boys are more likely to migrate for schooling, but nearly always work as well; boys and girls can be informally fostered; early marriage can lead to girls in urban destinations too.

It seems urban destinations could be more complex than rural destinations, with motives and means of movement being more varied (without implying anything about their relative magnitudes). Young (2004) made a similar point in comparing the greater complexity of street children's migration in Kampala to smaller provincial centres. The point connects to debates on the rural/urban location of poverty, such as Satterthwaite (1995), in the long-standing argument that the extent of urban poverty is often concealed and under-appreciated.

Children's independent migration, located firmly in informal sectors, may be a component of such 'hidden' dimensions of urban poverty, and connect to development agendas on 'unregulated' urbanisation. The diversity of children's characteristics and contexts in urban destinations may complicate also understanding of children's protection and support needs. However there is not enough information by rural/urban destinations in the studies reviewed to comment further.

Intra-family problems were cited under non-economic factors. Also, significant numbers were located on streets. These two findings may turn out, with further research, to have some *joint* importance. Intra-family problems may signal less adult involvement in organising a child's independent migration; and second, streets are places of work and/or places of shelter. Accessing certain types of work often requires adult involvement; and shelter is even more strongly adult-mediated. A hypothesis could be that intra-family problems not only trigger some independent migration, but may limit arrangements for livelihoods and shelter at destinations. Some children's migration arrangements may be so lacking, leaving only street-based work and shelter (in addition to those who, for other reasons, may actively choose the street).

These issues are revisited in the next section that attempts to detail the process through which children migrate independently, and again in section 5 that attempts a conceptual discussion of children's independent movements based on evidence presented. Many themes repeated later appear in the survey data reviewed. These include motives around poverty and asset accumulation (see for example, Tanzania); the role (perhaps even 'success') of migration in meeting immediate consumption and savings needs (see for example Mali and El Salvador); the organisation and modes of movement (see for example Thailand and Burkina Faso); retained contacts back home (see for example Ghana and Zambia); education attainments and aspirations; and the possibility that many children recruit themselves into migration.

Remittances and earnings by independent migrant children are under-researched. The financing of the costs of migration (and whether debt was involved), the financial returns to working, and the ability to save safely are likely to be important factors that differentiate independent migrant children from one another, and affect their experiences at destination and their ability to visit their families. Some of the qualitative literature cited below mentions remittances.

Whilst some return unwillingly for various reasons, research on return child migrants shows that many do not fit the picture of being trapped at destination, for example by traffickers. On the other hand, economic and social costs of return are reported, and may prevent some children from returning, or circular-migrating, more freely. Whilst repatriation services might serve as a safety-net for some children, it might not be always necessary or wanted, since

many children are in fact in contact with their families and return home for visits. Several surveys found children in hardship at destination who nonetheless did not want to return home, but valued independence and the possibility of a better life. Intentions to re-migrate suggest some children want to migrate even after being informed about migration through first-hand experiences (and a similar point is noted below, for example by Orgocka and Jasini 2007, on first migration intentions).

#### **4. DO CHILDREN DEMAND MIGRATION OPPORTUNITIES?**

An important issue relates to the extent to which children want to migrate. If children are moved against their will and exploited, then clearly they have been trafficked. Alternatively, if children want to migrate but have few opportunities to do so, unsafe forms of migration are more likely. Also costly smugglers might be used, or traffickers can exploit the situation. Alternatively again, if children wilfully migrate and contribute positively to their and their families' development, then this raises unexplored issues in migration-development linkages related to children's participation and agency, and the particular support and protections that this may require. These development-related aspects cannot be adequately considered through a child trafficking lens with its emphasis on children in harm, and its necessity by definition of criminal involvement (since trafficking is always a crime).

Qualitative research with child migrants, parents and employers has shed light on this issue. Many of the studies recognise the obvious research challenge that decisions are multi-layered, and uncovering the process is difficult. The in-depth, multiple sourced and highly contextual accounts from ethnography and participatory research methods have helped considerably in building the evidence base. It shows that pin-pointing criminal involvement in the independent movements of some children may be problematic, and therefore trafficking difficult to identify; and instead, their vulnerabilities are rooted in low development in terms of poverty; limited access to markets, schools and healthcare; and social participation and human rights protections.

The following discussion is set out in four parts:

1. How is children's independent migration decided and organised?
2. What motives might children have for migrating independently?
3. How do children migrate independently?
4. What are children's situations at destination?

These questions are important for understanding the demand side of children's independent migration, and also why parents often support it or do little to prevent it.

##### **4.1 How is children's independent migration decided and organised?**

In places where children's independent migration has been documented, it seems it is normal that a child can decide to do it, or play a substantial role in the decision. Sometimes migration is entirely initiated and executed by children. Key indicators include who the decision-makers are; the organisation and financing of the travel; how shelter at destination is secured (if at all); and children's planned activities at destination (recruitment into paid work, unpaid work, schooling, on-the-job training or some combination). The research reflects views of children and parents at origins, and child and parental reports on the role of 'third parties'.

A common perception is that independent migration by under 15 year olds is unviable. Iversen (2002) reports evidence on the degree of autonomy of under 15 year olds in their

independent migration from Karnataka state, India (N=169 children).<sup>37</sup> Average age-at-migration was 11.6 years for boys and 9.6 years for girls. Three-quarters went to Bangalore city (110 km away) and a tenth left the state. Girls made up 14 per cent and were nearly all domestic servants. Boys worked mainly in restaurants, bars and shops.

Interviews were conducted at origins and destinations, with children and parents separately providing accounts of the decision-making. A strict definition of children's autonomous migration was adopted whereby it had to be an "unambiguous reflection of a migrant's independent wish to leave home, without any parental pressure on the migrant to leave, and without any parental involvement in decision-making, in employment or shelter arrangement" (pp. 821). Consequently this excluded several cases where migration was the child's decision but involved some parental support.

Some 25 per cent of children's migration aged 10-14 years was clearly autonomous. All were boys. This was 3.6 per cent of the village population of 10-14 year old boys. The definition ruled out any direct parental role in the migration decision (in the other 75 per cent, some form of co-decisions with parents took place). Of the autonomous migrants, over two-thirds did not seek parental consent and three-quarters over-rode parental wishes on work/residence. On the other hand, these were not runaways in that relationships with the family were generally maintained, even where the migration involved conflicting preferences.

Children also took responsibility for the organisation (or lack of it) of migration. Around 58 per cent migrated without prearranged work (almost all found work in a day at destination), 29 per cent arranged their own work via older migrants outside the kinship network, 12 per cent arranged via relatives, and strikingly, none arranged via peers. Peers seemed to have few practical contacts (Iversen 2006). Most travelled with peers or relatives, and rarely travelled alone.

Poverty and low human capital were not barriers to migration. Whether a child migrated autonomously was uncorrelated to per capita household wealth, land holding or the boy's schooling; it was correlated to higher caste, intra-family conflict, being aged 14 rather than 10, and having migrant peers.

For certain groups, if a child migrated, it was more likely autonomous (as defined) than non-autonomous. A 10 year old migrant from a home with domestic discord had 21 per cent probability of being autonomous, but by age 14 this rose to nearly 90 per cent. When 5 per cent of peers were migrants, a 14 year old had 78 per cent probability of migrating autonomously rather than non-autonomously. Even without domestic discord, a 14 year old child migrant was 55 per cent likely to be autonomous than non-autonomous. The results suggest that whilst under 12 year olds rarely migrated without parental involvement, "boys 12-14 regularly made labour migration decisions independently" (Iversen 2006).

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<sup>37</sup> A survey was conducted in 21 villages in one district in Karnataka, covering all households (153) with migrant children under 15 years old, and resulted in data on 134 current migrant children and 35 return migrant children. In addition, 95 of the current migrant children were surveyed at destination.

Orgocka and Jasini (2007) study the various decision-makers that may be involved. This asked 150 children and 150 adults (parents and others) in rural northwest Albania on who facilitates children's independent migration from their communities. These communities had low incomes, low human development indicators, and high unemployment. One-in-three had a migrant family member.

Table 3 shows the percentages citing children themselves, parents, peers and emigrants (those currently abroad) as facilitators of children's independent migration (see table-notes for survey questions). Whilst the absolute data is not so informative, the variations are revealing.

Large majorities cited both children and parents (first two columns). Child-facilitation was cited somewhat more than parental-facilitation. Whilst child-facilitation and parental-facilitation were cited fairly uniformly by most types of respondents, columns 3 and 4 show peers and emigrants were cited far more by the oldest children, and far less by adults. Whilst older children noted the importance of peers and emigrants, adults failed to do so, including parents.

**Table 3: Who facilitates children's independent migration from Albania?**

<b>Respondents:</b>	<b>Answers on who facilitated, % agreeing (see note)</b>			
	<b>Child</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Peers</b>	<b>Emigrants</b>
16-18 yr olds	85	59	62	75
13-15 yr olds	86	54	44	53
10-12 yr olds	90	67	43	63
Parents	67	40	17	73
Community members	63	50	23	63
Border police	100	100	20	60
Anti-trafficking police	84	60	36	76
Teachers	71	67	32	62
State employees	57	63	10	63

*Note:* the column 'Children facilitate' shows the per cent that agreed that Children are led by someone who promises him/her better life abroad; 'Parents facilitate' shows agreement that Parents pay someone to facilitate the leaving; 'Peers facilitate' shows agreement that A peer the child knew organises the leaving; 'Emigrants facilitate' shows agreement that Emigrants facilitate children's migration

*Source:* adapted from data in Orgocka and Jasini (2007), pp. 25-7

Orgocka and Jasini also report the proportions wanting to migrate in the near future: 10 per cent of 10-12 year olds, 15 per cent of 13-15 year olds and 26 per cent of 16-18 year olds. Almost all children believed work at destination would be necessary, and the majority reported knowing about risks of being exploited sexually, for organ sale, crime, or being sold. Previewing the later discussion, fake papers and walking over the mountains were cited by children as possible means for their travel.

Similar results on children's awareness about migration are reported in Ghana. Beauchemin (1999) surveyed 805 children in junior secondary schools in rural Ghana. Two-thirds had migrant relatives and friends aged below 20 years. Girls said migration helped avoid early marriage, and helped prepare for eventual marriage. Over 80 per cent would like to leave their locality to seek new opportunities. The study also interviewed 174 children who

dropped out of school, three-quarters because of lack of money. The majority wanted to migrate, commonly indicating a desire to escape what they saw as the hopelessness of their rural lives.

Beauchemin (1999) also interviewed 282 parents in several villages in Ghana. Many parents said their children simply left. 81 per cent approved or thought their child's decision to migrate was a good idea. Half had more than one migrant child. When they migrated, 14 per cent of children were aged under 10 years, and 64 per cent between 12-17 years. Most parents knew where their children had gone, although they had contact only once or twice a year (8 per cent had no contact). Many migrate for around half the year in the low season, and return to continue schooling with their earnings.

Beauchemin (1999) quotes a 15 year old porter in Kumasi, Ghana who originally left school to raise the family's cows: "One day I told my father I had to get some clothes altered. I bought a bus ticket and told my brother to take the bike back home. I knew by the time he got there, it would be too late for my father to do anything. I wasn't afraid when I left. I had cedi 30,000 and the bus ticket cost cedi 10,000. I arrived in Kumasi around 6 a.m. I didn't know anyone here. [He found a job via a clansman he met on the street.] In the beginning it was really hard because people cheat you. Sometimes I earn cedi 10,000 a day, sometimes nothing. So you have to save."

De Lange (2006) studied rural to rural independent child migration in Burkina Faso. Most were in cotton production. The study interviewed 40 return migrant boys at origin, and 14 migrant boys at destination and their farmer-employers. Boys aged 10 and above migrated up to 200 km, on contracts that lasted normally a year. Independent child migration is so established that children nearly always undertook the migration decision (and like Iversen's study in Karnataka, sometimes without parental knowledge). Parents worried about their children's safety and health; and some were concerned about losing their children's labour and company. However, few parents actively attempted to prevent their child's independent migration.

De Lange's interviews at destination revealed children's strong dependency on their employers, who usually provided room and board, and paid at the end of the contract (also reported in India by Venkateswarlu, 2007). Some children were paid less than promised or not at all. Returning without money was considered shameful, forcing some to stay in the hope of being paid. Some boys – mostly with little or no schooling – had migrated several times despite knowing the hardships (and this echoes the survey evidence on return migrants). Some continued school after returning, having earned their school fees.

Recruitment and transport by others – key elements in international definitions of trafficking – did not necessarily alter the risks faced by migrant children in this setting. Most children left with recruiters; others went alone or in groups. Recruiters were often older boys, or farmers looking for workers (who transported extra children for neighbouring farmers). Children who were recruited and children who migrated without recruiters were no different from each other in their backgrounds, or in their subsequent experiences at destination.

Information based on larger samples on recruitment in this region is given by the cocoa sector study (discussed above), which surveyed 4500 farms in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria (IITA 2002). An intermediary was involved in recruiting 30-40 per cent of the child workers, but the bulk of recruitment was by other workers, children making contacts themselves or by the farmer directly. In the cases of recruitment by intermediaries, none of the children reported their parents being paid and none reported being forced against their will to leave home, and most claimed to know the recruiter.

Camacho's (1999) interviews with 50 migrant domestic workers aged 14-17 years in Manila, Philippines found that many started as provincial migrants when young, and then migrated to Manila when older. Over half were under 15 years old when they started in domestic service, and 22 per cent were under 15 years old when they migrated to Manila. The Manila job was located by an agency in 8 per cent of cases, by parents for 6 per cent, by themselves in 4 per cent, and the rest by friends or relatives. Around 80 per cent of children said the decision to work was theirs, and 14 per cent consulted neither parent. For the majority, parents and siblings participated in the decisions, although the ultimate decision rested with the migrating child. Camacho describes how families try (not always successfully) to use social networks to provide protective environments, even long-distance.

Dezso et al. (2005) describe a Romanian mother's thoughts about her son's migration abroad. The family was landless, and both parents were unemployed except for seasonal work. Their son let them know he would seek work abroad because he had heard how well things were going for their fellow villagers there. The parents could not offer a better option, so they let their 14-year-old son go to France. Dezso et al. found that over a third of respondents at places of origin believed that migrant children from their communities were begging, stealing or in prostitution; moreover many were unwilling to talk about this in focus groups, and mentioned it only in the survey.

Heissler (2008) argues that in Bangladesh despite constraining factors, children show many ways of manipulating structures to serve their individual preferences. Heissler interviewed 58 independent child migrants in Dhaka, and 105 parents and community members at origins. Heissler argues greater education raised community-wide aspirations for salaried work, but this was out of reach of all but the wealthiest children, because most left school around the age of puberty. Non-farm income was crucial in the study areas because of high landlessness; and abandonment or death of the male breadwinner put further migratory pressure on children. Heissler also noted that children may migrate in order to do work that would be beneath their family's social status locally, whilst other children refused to migrate because migration would mark their family as low status.

### **Summing-up**

Information on decisions and decision-makers is important for identifying migration from trafficking, by recognizing that many children help decide their own independent movements, and often, criminal involvement is difficult to state (much less prosecute). In some places children are involved in influencing their migration by age 10 years, and this is consistent with survey evidence on age presented earlier. Recalling another earlier discussion, decision-making processes in children's independent migration should not be seen in isolation to the

social and economic factors that underpin child quantity-quality tradeoffs, which can motivate parents and societies towards greater investments in children, and alter their migration dis/incentives.

Apart from helping to define movements, research on decision-making indicates factors that influence arrangements for travel, shelter, work, schooling and care, at destination. Age, gender, poverty and family disharmony seem to condition these key aspects of migration preparedness. Some parents reported no involvement in the decision-making (which did not necessarily mean losing contacts with children after migration), and so the children concerned would have forfeited adult access to resources, information and networks (although some parents might have had little to offer in the first place).

Related to this, the role of peers in migration decision-making needs more rigorous study, because whilst children may state peer-influence, their practical contributions may be limited by, for example, their age, gender and situations at destinations. This may indicate a more general question of how far children can be independent in deciding and organising their movements before the movement becomes extremely risky.

#### **4.2 What are the motives for children's independent migration?**

Many children see their migration both as part of their families' livelihoods strategies, and their own goals of progress, independence and transition into adulthood. A minority use migration to escape domestic abuse, violence, and early marriage. Economic and health shocks in the family may also cause the migration of some.

Broadly there seems to be three sets of motives:

1. income generation for consumption, family roles and intrahousehold positioning;
2. accumulation of assets and human capital within lifecycle transitions ('future seeking');  
and
3. self-protection.

#### **Consumption, family roles and intrahousehold positioning**

In Camacho's (2006) study in the Philippines, migrant children often perceived their position in their families to have improved. Camacho argues that children's migration is a complex site for negotiation, with interweaving family and personal goals. This interweaving was also apparent in the Karnatakan, Ghanaian and Burkinabe research already discussed.

According to Camacho, children's position in this depends on the extent of their independent social networks and access to work (although children may share decisions over migration to maintain family relations). Brown (2007) found that children in Cambodia often used their own social networks to place themselves into domestic work. Relatives and friends were part of the network, but also neighbours and market sellers.

Punch (2002) proposes the notion of 'negotiated interdependence' as a useful way of understanding how independent migrant children work within their structural limitations whilst fulfilling both individual and families' needs, and asserting some levels of agency over

their life choices. Punch studied Bolivian independent child migrants to rural areas of Argentina. Punch notes similar themes reviewed here in other countries, in terms of the effects on children's independent migration of land scarcity, gender, birth order and seasonality. Punch (2007a) argues that children can use even unpaid labour to increase their 'generational power' to become more independent and learn new skills; and that migration can be simultaneously empowering (back home) and disempowering (at destinations).

Some studies have found children's migration motives formulated in terms of earning their own possessions. Of course this is partly consumption choices, but also seems part of family roles because of the particular items that children wanted to earn. These include especially those items that enhance their autonomy, such as bikes (De Lange 2006) and sewing machines (Hashim 2005). Castle and Diarra (2003)'s study of 10-18 year old independent migrants from rural Mali found girls wanted articles for their marriage, while boys wanted articles to increase their status. In Heissler's (2008) study in Bangladesh, some independent girl migrants said they were saving for their marriage dowry. The Laotian survey above also cited economic independence (Phetsiriseng 2003).

Of course children's family roles are connected to perceptions of childhood. A study in Burkina Faso (TdH 2003) asked adults about this. It found varied responses from those defining childhood as under 10 years of age (based on ideas about capacity for self-reflection), under 15 years of age (based on ideas about decision-making), or older adolescence (somebody unmarried). Around 40 per cent of adults felt 10-14 year olds should do the same tasks as adults.

Migrant children in Ghana and the Gambia cite "...strong expectations in family systems that children should start 'giving back' to their parents as soon as they are able, usually by their early teens" (Chant and Jones 2005, p.191). In Omokhodion et al.'s (2006) survey of migrant and non-migrant children aged 8-17 years working in a market in Nigeria (N=225), around half of whom were also in school, found that 46 per cent thought children should not work and a quarter thought it signalled deprivation, but also that work was beneficial for providing incomes, helped their parents and was a training for becoming responsible adults (a point echoed in the discussion next on education).

Migrant children's remittances are documented by Anarfi et al. (2005). This includes an 18 year old migrant in rural Ghana remitting to his parents since age 14, by doing farming work; a 14 year old migrant in Dhaka, Bangladesh remitting to his mother, who is household head and works partly as a domestic servant; and a 13 year old girl in Accra, Ghana working as a marker porter who remitted cash, a set of household utensils for her mother and another set for her marriage. Anarfi et al. provide detailed experiences of 17 independent child migrants from four countries. Several cases underlined independent migrant children's need for safe means of saving – a point connected to the next section on their goals of accumulation.

Independent earnings – and sending remittances – may contribute to strengthening children's intrahousehold positions, for much the same reasons research has shown it does for women. Other factors would be birth-order and gender, which indeed seem to be correlates of independent child migration. A motive for children's independent migration appears to be

*independence* itself, but firmly located within the family structure and as part of their lifecycle processes.

In other words, many of the children involved do not seek independence by being ‘runaways’ but by being active family members and by enhancing their family roles through migration. This is a key point of differentiation between ‘runaways’ and independent child migrants. Furthermore, echoing research on return child migrants reported earlier, the fact that independent child migration is located within families would question the common policy assumption that independent child migrants *need* to be ‘reunited’ with their families for their well-being. Many are already in contact with their family, and premature return to home might undermine their efforts towards strengthening their intra-family positions, possibly a key indicator of successful migration for these children.

### **Future-seeking**

Continuing the quote above from the 15 year old porter in Kumasi, Ghana in Beauchemin (1999): “I put my money in a *susu* [informal savings groups]. I’ve saved cedi 200,000. I’d have a lot more but I’ve been robbed often. Like yesterday, somebody stole cedi 14,000. I sleep at the kiosk in the main bus station. I don’t have to pay because I clean the kiosk. I want to go back home [for a while]. I also want to help my father. But I’ll come back to Kumasi. My dream is to set up a television repair shop here.”

Some research suggests migration may be seen as one of the few routes to social-economic mobility, particularly by children endowed with limited opportunities from their parents and communities. Heissler (2008) reports the case of an independent migrant girl from a landless family in Bangladesh, whose younger sister and two brothers were not migrants. The girl said the decision to migrate into domestic work was hers, jointly with her parents. Earnings by the girl, her father and brothers helped buy land, and the resulting upward economic mobility was reported by village members as to why the younger siblings did not migrate.

Land aspirations were also cited in the Tanzanian study above (Liviga and Mekacha 1998). Touray (2006) argues that in semi-arid areas in Asia and Africa, migration by youth is related to limited access to land, exacerbated by desertification.

Hashim (2005) notes that generally children’s independent migration is thought to harm education, but case studies show this is not always true and independent migrant children sometimes manage to combine work with schooling, informal apprenticeships or skills training. Hashim’s research was based on tracing 65 rural-rural and rural-urban independent child migrants from northeast Ghana. In one case, a 12 year old girl was informally fostered by a relative for schooling, and on tracing her, she was indeed going to school but also she reported working as a domestic servant.

Hashim also notes that some children appeared to have been fostered/ migrated to do the work of children in school (i.e. replace lost household labour). Also the types of jobs and skills training available differed for girls and boys, and often required fees or unpaid work.

From a census of one village in that area Hashim found that 77 of the 447 children, 15 per cent of the child population, were independent migrants (a further 17 children in the village were returned migrants). Children started farming at age 4 years and by age 14 were given the same tasks as adults. Age, gender and status hierarchies determined the organisation and division of labour in farming. Production was rain-fed, labour intensive, and aimed for enough food for the year and surplus for cash necessities.

Schooling was seen as one of several factors in a child's future, including job prospects and the family's livelihoods. Most households invested in post-primary schooling for only the most able and determined child, with other children having to increasingly negotiate as they reached productive ages. Hashim found that independent migration was often a way for children to earn an income to continue schooling where families had left off (or more rarely to finance siblings' schooling).

In reference to Burkina Faso, based on interviews with parents and migrant children, Thorsen (2007) argues families might diversify across children to take advantage of available opportunities, reduce sibling rivalry, and optimise within resource constraints. This might mean that children could be treated differently in the family, in terms of support for schooling, fostering, apprenticeship and work (and the role of migration in these). These choices are argued to differ by boys and girls, and in the context of polygamous families, be differently approached by fathers and mothers.

Curran (1996) found that in Thailand household decisions concerning 12-21 years olds and their education versus rural-urban migration depended on gender and sibling order. Both of these are argued to be markers of intrahousehold positions. The study villages were poor, had high migration rates, high fertility, and land scarcity. Sons were preferred for education, both sons and daughters migrated, but daughters were more likely to remit wages, because of their greater reliance on the kinship network.

Camacho (1999) reports reasons for migration given by independent migrant children in domestic service in Manila. Amongst reasons, such as family poverty and consumer items, a high percentage (30 per cent) said that paying for education was their motive. Some children were paying for their own education and others were paying for the education of siblings.

Similar arguments are in Giani (2006) for Bangladesh concerning schooling availability and its quality at origins and destinations, family valuations of schooling, children's productive roles, and alternatives opened by migration via social networks and informal fostering. Giani notes that some children's independent migration is replacement labour for other children in school. Giani argues that migration patterns, and whether schooling is included or not, are affected by the terms of departure from home and family involvement in the migration.

### **Self-protection**

Adugna (2006) quotes a 15 year old in Ethiopia: "My parents didn't want to send me to town. My mother was crying while I left the village... I said I better go somewhere and try my best instead of dying of hunger there. I saw poverty in my mother's face." Adugna surveyed 50 independent migrants aged 8-18 years living on the streets in Addis Ababa. Whilst 12 per

cent were orphans, three-quarters had at least one surviving parent. Almost 40 per cent had never been to school.

Adugna found that work was overwhelmingly the main reason for migration, but domestic violence and escaping marriage were also cited. Over 80 per cent were from subsistence farming or daily waged families. Half maintained contact with their families, mainly visiting home once or twice a year. Adugna also found migrant street children and local street children did not mix, and the locals accused the migrants of being simple-minded and undercutting their wages. Police and the fear of arrest were cited as serious problems.

Illness, death and other shocks within families are likely to be some triggers and conditioning factors in children's self-protection. Ansell and Blerk (2004) found that in communities with high rates of HIV, children migrated for work, to care for sick relatives and be cared for; directions of migration included all four rural/urban combinations; and a third migrated more than once, mainly due to instabilities in their circumstances. The role of migration to address risks, such as by diversifying family incomes, is well-recognised in migration literature.<sup>38</sup> Children's independent migration may be part of this. Akresh (2004) shows that income shocks trigger informal child fostering in West Africa. Some authors argue that children's work may act as a buffer against shocks as a form of 'informal insurance' (Beegle et al. 2006; Maitra et al. 2006; Fitzsimons 2004; Curran et al. 2003).

Conticini and Hulme (2006) found that in Bangladesh domestic abuse contributed to children's independent migration to the streets. They cite an official estimate of 500,000 street children in the main cities. In their survey of 93 street children in Dhaka, 89 per cent were migrants and three-quarters were from poor families. Children stated that economic independence was a means to free themselves from abuse and excessive control. Just 5 per cent of boys and no girls reported that in the year before leaving home they were free of physical, emotional or sexual violence (11 per cent of boys and 24 per cent of girls were subject to all three). Perpetrators ranged from parents, stepparents, relatives, and school teachers. "The child learns to consider migration as a concrete alternative to acceptance of violence. Migration to the street must be seen as process. It is a decision that develops over time." (p. 35).

Conticini and Hulme argue that many types of programmes attempt to assist children in street situations, but the high spatial mobility, independence, and suspicion of adults, means that attempts to provide support and reintegration are problematic and often unsuccessful. Even when food, accommodation and basic income is provided by shelters, many children return to the street, and this is argued to be due to the strength of social bonds they form there. They argue a process of adaptation takes place as children learn self-reliance commit themselves to life on the streets, whilst others see it as a transit point, and temporary refuge.

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<sup>38</sup> This literature is fairly large – a partial review is in de Haan and Yaqub (2007). For example, Halliday (2008) shows variations between men and women in how migration and risks are linked in El Salvador; and Henry et al. (2004) show that in Burkina Faso the relationship between migration and risks is differentiated by migration destination and duration. Children's migration was not considered explicitly in either study, but they show how migration-development linkages can vary across persons and migration patterns.

Brown's (2007) study of child domestic workers in Cambodia found several children came from abusive or dysfunctional backgrounds. Homeowners may view themselves as offering as an escape route. The presence of stepparents is argued to increase the likelihood of migration. There was also evidence of homeowners targeting children in abject poverty and hunger, especially after the death of a breadwinner.

Stites et al. (2007) found that in Uganda domestic abuse, hunger and abandonment by stressed families were some reasons for children's migration, and for living and working independently on the streets. The study concerned migrant communities in the northeast where historically children and youth migrated within the social network, but recently there has been increased numbers who migrate into contexts not pre-arranged by their families.

Families reported a steady decline in livelihoods or health status prior to experiencing a final 'more discrete' trigger that resulted in out-migration by family members. The authors suggest that as managers of household food security, mothers were important decision-makers in children's migration. Some families reported their children left without their knowledge, and in other cases children are cited as approaching their parents to migrate for income generation. Some children reported selling firewood to have the cash for the transport, and others said they had their fare paid at destination by prospective employers. In several cases, young migrants returned with food and cash, and took siblings with them when they re-migrated. Sometimes highly stressed households sent young siblings, even under 5 years old.

Beauchemin (1999) reports the case of a 10 year old porter and cleaner in Kumasi, Ghana, who migrated with his father and three siblings and left his mother and another three siblings at home. His father returned to the village without leaving any money, and the boy was supporting himself and three siblings. Presumably the children did not return home because for some reason that would have been a worse option than remaining as independent migrants. In this case, the children were not independent migrants in travel, but were at destination.

Another similar situation may arise when migrant parents are repatriated or incarcerated for some reason. For example, significant numbers of children of North Korean descent live in border provinces of China, by some estimates between a few thousand to tens of thousands (HRW 2008). With one or more parents of North Korean origin, the children remain without legal residence permit. Most North Korean children come with their parents, but some parents are arrested and repatriated without managing to notify their children and the children remain in China.

### **4.3 How do independent migrant children move?**

There seem to be two main modes of movement for independent child migrants.

1. Some children's movements are facilitated through the kinship network or take place as a result of early marriage. The organisation, and even the fact of movement, might not be recognised as migration due to it being highly socially embedded. Also the migration distance is defined by the spatial reach of the kinship network, and so this mode of migration is more likely to result in internal migration.

2. Many children migrate outside of the kinship network. Their migration seems more closely tied to labour-markets, and may track adult migrant flows and routes better than kinship movements. Consequently this mode of children's independent migration may be more reliant on high rates of adult and peer migration to 'show the way'.

### **Social and kinship movements**

Substantial numbers of children in poor countries move through the kinship network, many still having surviving parents. Across West Africa, between a fifth and a third of households (varying by the country) have other people's children under 15 years living with them, and some 90 per cent of these children have at least one parent surviving (Pilon 2003). Fostering away from surviving parents can be high even amongst young children in some countries. Kielland (2008) reports that in Benin, 1.5 per cent of 0-2 year olds do not live with a parent but have one or both alive (this applies to 9.5 per cent of 3-5 year olds, 14.3 per cent of 6-9 year olds and 18.4 per cent of 10-14 year olds).

The causes of fostering can vary from illness/ death in the origin household, economic hardship, parental divorce/ separation, labour needs in the destination household, broadening children's experiences, and children's schooling needs. Although fostering commonly involves adult arrangements, children are frequently active in the many choices involved in the process, and sometimes may use the social structures to their advantage, such as by initiating their own fostering (Leinaweaver 2007b). Ansell and Blerk (2004) make the same point in Malawi and Lesotho, but also indicate constraints on children's agency in communities with high (HIV-related) illness and death.

Leinaweaver (2007) argues that children's independent migration through the social network in Peru is part of strengthening kinship "from the ground up". All parties have an interest: sending parents regret losing a loved child and a contributor to the household but may have obligations towards the recipient family, or wish to strengthen a relationship, or wish to promote their child's life chances; the receiving household may want the child for reciprocal social reasons or household help; the child may miss the natal home, but welcome the opportunity to ease parental burdens and find new opportunities, particularly schooling. Brown (2007) discussed below suggests in Laos this may have played a role in some children's migration into domestic work.

Leinaweaver suggests a continuum in which the more distant the relationship between receiving adult and migrant child, the more likely that exploitation will occur or that the exchange-based aspects will give way to a more recognizable employer-employee relation. This point is supported by data presented below that compares rates of child labour between children with and without parents (see also Mexican survey evidence cited above).

### **Labour-market linked movements**

Children's independent migration across borders is mostly undocumented. The literature notes that many children simply cross over fences or rivers marking borders, and others may even cross unrecorded at official border points (Adhikari and Pradhan 2005; SCF 2007). Often below the age for work permits, and with little official entitlements to services at destination, independent child migrants have few incentives to identify themselves to

authorities. Independent child migrants in South Africa crossing from Mozambique have described their travel on foot, and some have had to over-night in territories with wild animals and other dangers (SCF 2008).<sup>39</sup>

Phetsiriseng (2003) reports that in Laos social networks linked to labour markets help independent child migrants to travel undocumented, and that migration costs sometimes equals half of the salary. Similar pictures emerge in the studies reviewed on Karnataka, Philippines and Ghana. Punch (2007c) found Bolivian migrants to rural Argentina often went on contracts covering transport, subsistence and border crossing, with payment at the end; and this type of contract might be attractive to new migrants. Punch reports a 14 year old returning after four months with US\$ 600.

This suggests that some children's independent migration might resemble adult irregular migration more closely than regular, following similar routes, smugglers, and processes of exclusion at destination. But the literature on irregular migration appears simply to have overlooked children. For example, an estimated three to five million irregular migrants are in South Africa (Koser 2005, citing UN DESA), but a fairly systematic country-study on the issue makes no reference to children (Waller 2006).<sup>40</sup>

### **Summing-up**

Information on children's modes of movement is important. First, it may help explain why this group of migrants has been missed in mainstream debates. Secondly, qualitative variations in the mode of movement may signal children's relationships to adults involved (if any), and thus play a (positive or negative) role in arrangements for children's shelter, livelihoods, education, nurture, etc., at destinations. Third, modes of movement may be linked to how poor households – otherwise constrained in their migration opportunities – incorporate themselves into migration.

#### **1. Problems in recognising children's independent migration**

The way that children move independently seems to be part of why they are not recognised easily as migrants. There are two aspects of this.

According to the literature reviewed, it seems generally not the case that independent migrant children travel alone. For most, the movement seems accompanied, either with other children, relatives or smugglers. This means that independent child migrants might not be easily identified.

Children's modes of movement lead to non-migrant labels attached to some independent child migrants. Children who move through kinship networks may be called fostered. Children who move through non-kinship networks but fail to find shelter at destination, are

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<sup>39</sup> Eschbach, Hagan and Rodriguez (2003) found a range of causes of mortality of undocumented migrants on the southern border of USA, and that changes in border security over time affected the risks faced by migrants in movement by leading to changes in migratory routes towards open countryside. Ruiz (2001) maps various dangers on the Guatemalan-Mexican border, and argues that even in movement variations exist across migrants in their capacity "...to anticipate, manage, resist and cope" (p.30).

<sup>40</sup> The same was found in studies on China (Skeldon 2001), Turkey (Içduygu 2003), Asia (Hugo 2005), and former Soviet Union countries (Tishkov et al. 2005).

called street children or runaways. Early marriage is another non-migrant label for children's independent movements.<sup>41</sup> These movements share many similar causes and processes, including economic factors.

## 2. Qualitative differences in movements

Although difficult to be more specific with current evidence, substantial differences are likely within each of the modes of movement described above. Even if moving through market-led mechanisms, there would seem to be potentially different ways of doing this, some better for children and some worse. Leinaweaver indicates a similar point for movements via kinship. This suggests that both types of movement might occur amongst all social-economic groups, but income, social connections and other advantages might help improve the terms of movement, whether through market-mechanisms or kinship. To access these resources, however, children's movements would need the involvement of adults.

## 3. Poverty linkages

Leinaweaver's (2007) argument that children's independent migration can be part of strengthening kinship is important, and links to poverty research that focuses on the role of social capital. Poor families might prefer kinship movement, if they can get it; or otherwise have to settle for market-driven recruiters outside the social network. Faced with this choice, poor families may be more willing to accept less favourable terms for one or more child's independent movement, as part of social networking for the whole family. As some poverty literature discusses, this decision-making might be less about current poverty (in a static sense) and as much about improving the chances of coping with the future by investing in social networks. Poor families have few assets to barter, of which children's independent migration might be one.

## 4.4 Situations at destination

Pearson et al. (2006) reported a survey of 696 migrants from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia, in Bangkok and surrounding areas, sampling workers in fishing, agriculture, manufacturing and domestic service. One-in-four was a child (5 per cent were under 15 years old). A fifth had been in Thailand before. Around a third spoke little or no Thai. Around 16 per cent had no schooling, and 58 per cent had 1-6 years of schooling. At the time of survey, 5 per cent were in part-time classes run by NGOs (all were working also).

Pearson et al. found age is an important factor in registering with authorities, for a residence paper, health card and work permit.<sup>42</sup> The sector with the highest registrations was also the sector with older workers, and child migrants preferred fishing and domestic work because those sectors seemed less regulated. Registration was also discouraged by employers, the time consuming process, changes of address and not understanding the process.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Early marriage should be considered because migration via marriage may be part of risk management in some contexts (Rosenzweig and Stark 1989); early marriage may reduce consumption demands on the parental household; in-law households receive labour in the forms of paid and unpaid work of married children; financial and transactional aspects of early marriage in some contexts (Jain and Kurz 2007); and the possibility that early marriage may serve the same purpose as migration for households with few migration opportunities.

<sup>42</sup> Special procedures would seem to be needed for children aged 15-17 years for these processes, where they are eligible.

<sup>43</sup> First, a residence card has to be obtained, then health card following a health examination, and finally a work permit. Thailand issues work permits for over 15 year olds.

Children felt less able to change jobs. Apart from indebtedness and withholding of documents, children were more fearful than adults of employer-violence or being reported to the police by employers or being arrested or not finding another job; also employers were more likely owe children money. Employers retained the originals of documents (sometimes giving photocopies), so even when registered, the fear of arrest remained and movement outside the workplace was limited.

Few children (<3 per cent) were falsely informed about their type of work or working conditions. A third of those aged 15 years, and 14 per cent of 15-17 year olds, had no information on this prior to migration. Children and unregistered workers were paid less than adult and registered workers, particularly in domestic work and agriculture. This suggests important sectoral differences in independent migrant children's well-being at destinations, although there is little research on this (discussed as a research gap below).

Most employers surveyed in this study preferred adults to children – even in domestic work, 80 per cent preferred adults. This is because employers perceived children as too young, less able to do the work, temporary and less responsible (although in domestic service these were cited less). This means that many children access jobs by being associated with an adult in some way.

Few used employment recruiters (10 per cent at origin and 2 per cent at destination), and 57 per cent used a transporter for the travel only. Less than a quarter paid the recruiter, and a third kept contact with the recruiter. Many recruiters are informal, and gain benefits over time by sending remittances or contacting family. A few were recruited and transported by police. In 9 per cent of cases families were paid in advance for the migrant's work. Domestic service was the worst sector.

Young (2004) reports the concentration of independent migrant children in towns bordering Uganda and Kenya for goods smuggling in the early 1990s, before the border was tightened and the numbers declined: “You could find 6 year old children carrying, you know, two packets of maize flour on their shoulders. They would carry two bottles (of beer), one in each hand across the border, and they would run to and fro the whole day” (quoting a NGO staff member).

Ansell and van Blerk's (2005) research with 200 children in Lesotho and Malawi found a strong association between migrants and rented housing. Government or commercial rental housing in southern Africa is in short supply. Most is poor quality and informally provided by small landlords. Ansell and van Blerk argue that housing is more than about shelter, because it influences children's care contexts, the indoor environment; the immediate outdoor environment; infrastructure, utilities and services; physical security; and security of tenure.<sup>44</sup>

Large shares of independent child migrants amongst street children, reported above, could be understood in terms of migrant children's limited *independent* access to housing. Children – particularly young ones – would seem to need the help of adults to secure housing at

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<sup>44</sup> There has been greater acknowledgement of children's rights in urban environments since Habitat II (UN Conference on Human Settlements, Istanbul 1996).

destination, either via social networks or housing-markets. Independent migrant children may arrive at destination without housing arranged because their parents lacked the economic and social resources, or if they migrated without parental involvement.

An assessment in border areas of South Africa found many independent migrant children from Zimbabwe.<sup>45</sup> Most came for livelihoods reasons, mainly in farming and petty services. Some use transactional sex, either in direct commercial sex or through 'boyfriend/sugar daddy' relationships. Most children said they tried to remain invisible to the authorities for fear of deportation, including the government's social welfare agencies. This makes it difficult to reach this group.

Once deported, many children return to South Africa because from a livelihood perspective the deportation represents a loss of income. When deported, many children do not want to be reunified with their families, and to avoid this they may lie about their age in order to be treated as an adult procedure, or withhold or provide incorrect information. The authors argue that involuntary family reunification is probably not an effective strategy, as children quickly find their way back. Involuntary family reunification may represent an additional burden on children that is not faced by adults.

A survey of 130 independent migrant children in two border towns in South Africa and Johannesburg found children as young as seven, with average age of 14 years (SCF 2007). Over half the children paid bribes or an informal guide to cross. Many had been assaulted whilst trying to cross the border.

One quarter of the children had been previously returned to their home country, and a further one quarter had been arrested but later released. The study found that the arrest was often not done in accordance with the law. This is likely to be due to the lack of clarity about the police's responsibility. Very few children had ever had contact with a social worker.

Crime was mentioned as the worst thing about being in South Africa. About one quarter made their money by selling in the street, while a similar number made nothing at all. Some 14 per cent made money by collecting plastic bottles from rubbish dumps. Less than 10 per cent of the children obtained food from a welfare organisation and most bought their own food or relied on begging.

Notably one-in-three in this survey accessed schooling. When asked what help they most needed in South Africa, the children were equally likely to cite jobs and schooling. There were stark differences between the children living in Johannesburg and those on the borders. Those on the borders had almost no access to education or to basic services. In spite of this, 72 per cent of the children felt that their lives in South Africa would be better than their parents' lives.

Lane (2008) argues that migration exposes children to new influences on health behaviour and new exposure to health risks, such as violence, STIs/HIV, and substance use.

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<sup>45</sup> United Nations-International Organization for Migration Joint-Assessment Report on the Situation of Migrants from Zimbabwe in South Africa, September 2007.

Reproductive health is particularly vulnerable because migrant children leave family and community systems that promote, reinforce, and monitor norms of appropriate sexual behaviour. While young people are more likely to be exposed to coercion or sexual violence in urban settings, they may also be more likely to engage in consensual, unprotected “survival” sex, such as to access food and shelter.

Lane notes it is important to consider, however, that young migrants themselves may not identify reproductive health as their top priority. Their health concerns may be more focused on day-to-day physical considerations such as acne, menstruation, dental care, and weight, or psychosocial issues such as relationships, education, and employment. This means that to maximize the effectiveness, relevance, and acceptability of interventions that target migrant children, their views need to be sought and integrated into programmes.

Brown (2007) surveyed 123 children in domestic work, living without their parents, in three provincial towns in Cambodia.<sup>46</sup> Around 70 per cent were migrants from agrarian families, and a few said their work was seasonal because their families could not provide for them all year round. Age at first entry into work was under 12 years for 12 per cent and 12-14 years for 26 per cent. Nearly 90 per cent were girls, and nearly half had primary schooling or more. One-in-five was the eldest, many citing responsibility to support siblings and their education; and around 16 per cent were the youngest, citing responsibility to support parents because older siblings had married and formed separate households. The surveyed children were over 5 times as likely to have a stepparent compared to the overall population.

Around half the children knew the homeowner before migrating. Children related to the homeowner were somewhat younger, had more schooling and migrated from further away. In recruitment, no children were promised different work and the work was as the children expected before migrating, although children living with relatives were less likely to be told they would work, be recognised as domestic workers and paid.

Sizeable family debt was present in over half the cases, the majority amounting to around two-thirds of average annual rural incomes, and many caused by unprotected shocks such as illness in the family (33 per cent), bad harvest (12 per cent) and hunger (9 per cent).<sup>47</sup> Brown cites another survey showing nearly four-fifths of Cambodian child beggars in Vietnam were from families in debt. This finding about debt was raised in a study on Bangladesh by Kabir et al. (2008) where migrants said the pressure to repay loans led to migration. Many loans were taken during periods of crisis, like illness.

In the Cambodian study, whether the child received any income was not entirely dependent on the homeowner’s income. Brown (2007, p.26) argues that alternative demand for children’s labour in garments, tourism and sex work, and across the border in Thailand, may account for some regional differences in children’s earnings in domestic service, and possibly increase participation by younger children (since the other sectors attract older children).

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<sup>46</sup> Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the homeowners and the children separately. One homeowner and two children refused.

<sup>47</sup> Brown argued that obligations between adults may influence children’s migration, although these were harder to detect.

Kwankye et al. (2007) report children's risks and coping strategies at destination in Kumasi and Accra, Ghana. The study interviewed 450 independent migrant children and adults aged 18-24 years who migrated as children. Over a quarter were aged 10-14 years, half were aged 15-19 years, and around a fifth were aged 20-24 years and migrated as children. Issues related to having no proper place to sleep, problems in being paid, harassment by night watchmen, heavy workloads, low incomes, competition in the labour market from more migrants and bad treatment by customers. Notably some 15 per cent said they faced no serious problems.

An important concern was shelter. A quarter had a home, but others slept in streets, markets, shop fronts, stations and kiosks (and sometimes paid to do so). This exposed them to uncomfortable sleep, bad weather, sexual harassment, robbery and assault. Children coped by sleeping in groups and with knives. A lack of shelter also meant that most bought cooked food, even though it was costlier. Many were food insecure and had to miss meals. Sleeping and eating out would raise risks of malaria and other insect-borne diseases, hygiene-related diseases, sexual diseases and food-related diseases.<sup>48</sup> Fewer than a quarter accessed a clinic ever. Over half were medicated by pharmacists, and another 15 per cent self-medicated. Many were sick but went without healthcare.

Job insecurity was a major risk. This was connected to the fact that nearly all were in informal sector work, and their low schooling levels offered few alternatives. Half had never been to school, and a third had completed primary school. Most earned under US \$2 a day. Some were earning for survival. Around three-quarters saved small amounts daily in informal savings schemes. Half said they remit money and goods.

The insecurity of independent migrant children's savings is a consistent theme in both quantitative and qualitative research. This is important because accumulation (and the shame of not having achieved it) may be a consideration for some independent migrant children's ability to visit their families or return-migrate. Several of the case studies mentioned independent migrant children relying on the trustworthiness of relatives or using informal savings systems (such as rotating savings and credit schemes), further underlining how children's independence is linked to informalisation because of the role of adults in mediating access to goods and services.

Based on interviews with 35 independent migrant children on the streets of Accra, Ghana, Orme and Seipel (2007) observed that most children seldom used publicly provided social services, and were generally sceptical of their ability to meet their needs, being either too strict or asked too many questions. The interviews showed that a strong focus on work was combined with reliance on a 'surrogate family' on the streets.

Hashim (2006) tries to draw out the positives and negatives of independent child migration from study sites in Ghana. Some children are subject to abusive and harmful contexts at destinations. But also migration allows some of them access to opportunities for income and

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<sup>48</sup> Around a quarter said they had ever had sex (the authors felt this to be too low). Half did so after migration. Age at first sex was under 15 years for a quarter, and 15-19 years for two-thirds. Around 14 per cent was forced or for money, and 75 per cent was mutual consent.

skills they might not otherwise have. This comes out in the positive way that migrant children spoke about their migration experiences. Also many migrant children expressed working for others to be preferable to working in the family, echoing earlier discussion of children seeking independence and family positioning. Hashim also notes that the positive comments need to be set within the context of the low development situations the migrant children originate from.

### **Summing-up**

Access to shelter, healthcare, schooling, training, safe employment, consumption, physical security and nurture are key elements that shape children's experiences at destinations. Much of migrant children's choices and responses are guided by these needs, and whilst adults may have many of the same ones, they may differ in content and sourcing.

There are age-specific limits on obtaining various documents in migration (e.g. residence permits, health permits, labour permits), and children's information, understandings, and abilities regarding these processes might be limited. Other aspects of life at destination may require some form of (benevolent) adult mediation. Much of the development significant of independent child migration lies in resolving their problems within *informal sectors* of employment, shelter and access to utilities, and this is common to internal and international migrants.

Although it should not be ignored that some independent migrant children may genuinely want to return home as a result of their experiences, at least for a while, research with children at destinations, even in hardship, also shows that many do not want to return home. Instead, many children want support in their efforts at destinations, and this requires understanding both the child development issues, and broader development processes that affect children's exclusion/ inclusion at destinations.

## 5. RESEARCH GAPS

This section discusses six research gaps that hamper understanding of links between migration and development:

1. conceptualisation of children's independent movements, such as to reduce confusions about what it is, particularly in relation to child trafficking, and to understand factors that influence it and are influenced by it;
2. field-based studies that can be generalised more;
3. more inclusive statistics and methodology on which to base debates on migration-development links;
4. labour-market and economic analyses that includes children's migration for work;
5. recognition of seasonality and temporal dynamics that affect the poorest in developing countries hardest;
6. analysis of the endogeneity of individuals selected into migration, and the implications of this for understanding links in migration-poverty and migration-inequality.

### 5.1 Conceptualisation of children's independent movements

Whilst children's independent migration is highly diverse (and often this is emphasised), the review indicates it is not just any children involved, but *particular* children, and the movement is not just any movement, but *particular kinds* of movement. A structure is identifiable across the diversity. Understanding factors in this structure would seem important in researching potential migration-development linkages. Children's independent movement is poorly conceptualised in migration research, and seems not to incorporate well the empirical evidence available.

#### A structural framework

Previous sections described the migration process from origins to destination broken down into four phases: decision-making and organisation of the migration; motives for migration; modes of movement; situations at destinations. Based on the review, each of these four phases seem to be best characterised as continuums or categorical variances. This is summarised below.

1. Children's agency and cooperation with family members in the decision to migrate and its organisation varies along a continuum of greater or lesser degree.
2. Motives for children's migration can range from immediate consumption and intrahousehold positions, to children who are more clearly future-seeking, to children who are for various reasons self-protecting, essentially due to failures in child protection systems.
3. The mode of movement can range from being strongly organised through kinship networks and embedded in various degrees of social reciprocity, to movements that respond more closely to labour markets and embedded with employers and recruiters.

4. Situations at destinations can be pre-organised to a greater or lesser extent in terms of children's basic needs, and hence the extent of self-dependence different independent migrant children need to exercise.

Most literature on independent child migration views one or other phase, but not collectively as a whole process. A natural extension is to see the four phases as causally connected. Children who exercise greater agency over decisions in their migration, and whose migration is more cooperatively organised with parents, are likely to be in a far better position to those that do not, since adults mediate many of the resources, contacts and opportunities needed for successful migration, and presumably the child's agency is also needed to bring these to bear more closely to the child's interests. This recalls especially Iversen's Indian study, Orgocka and Jasini's Albanian study and Camacho's Philippines study, reviewed above.

In phase 2, children who migrate for reasons other than self-protection would seem to be in stronger positions, with presumably greater safety-nets and exit options. Clearly phases 1 and 2 could be inter-connected processes in that children who migrate to self-protect are less likely to migrate cooperatively and their agency is likely to be highly constrained.

Phases 1 and 2 are also likely to determine the extent to which the migration occurs within a protective kinship context at phase 3. This is not to assume that migration through kinship is always protective, but to suggest that those situations that are protective are arrived at through the particularities of phase 1 and 2. Other child migrants are left by themselves to the vagaries of labour markets, smugglers and employers, perhaps because their agency is highly constrained by their general circumstances, and/or they have been able to draw little from adults for organising their migration, and/or their migration may be over-whelmed by their seeking self-protection. Similar themes appear in Leineweaver's Peruvian study and Inthasone's Laotian study.

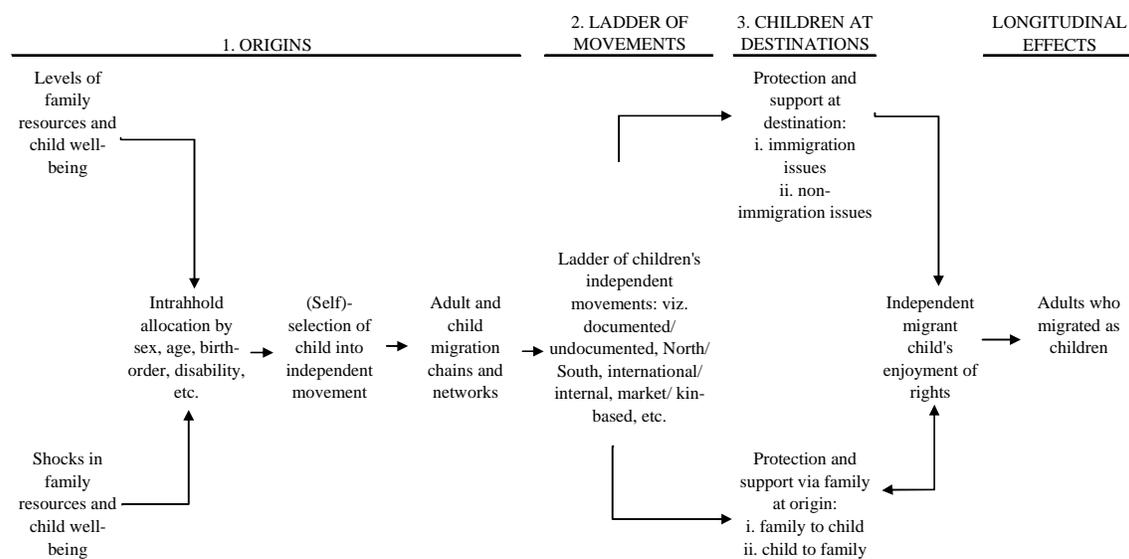
Phases 1, 2 and 3 together determine situations at destinations. Some children arrive at destination with not even shelter arranged and end up homeless, whilst others have a place to stay and may even have agreements for continued schooling. Whether a child is in the former rather than the latter group is likely to be a function of factors in earlier levels of the migration process. Whitehead and Hashim (2005, p. 31) write similarly: "Clearly the different kinds of migration have a profound effect. The Bolivian migration for agricultural work [in Argentina] is done by older children, is long established, and the working conditions, though hard, are relatively benign. All this is in marked contrast to the highly commoditised and apparently rapacious market for labour in Thailand."

The linkages across levels would seem to be also upward-structured (i.e. depending on macro forces) and downward-structured (i.e. depending on intrahousehold preferences). Section 2 discussed potential effects related to macro-structures in production, lifecycle dynamics and the child quantity-quality tradeoff. This means that the characteristics of children's independent migration in a particular country would itself depend on the country's level of development. Intrahousehold preferences would likely influence the selection of individual children into migration. Why one sibling rather than another; why one destination and not another? This is perhaps influenced along age-sex-destination characteristics, as was

summarised in Section 3. Girls and boys both migrate, but their movements are highly gendered and lifestaged.

Figure 3 presents the above discussion. It introduces the idea of ‘a ladder of qualitative differences’, from better to worse, in the various types of children’s independent movements. The idea is not to treat all independent movements by children as if they were the same. Some literature has raised the same idea of qualitative differences when referring to ‘safer migration’ (e.g. SCF 2007b).<sup>49</sup> Rungs on the ladder are defined by costs, rewards and risks of the movement, and characterised by factors ranging through documented/ undocumented, North/ South, international/ internal, market/ kin-based, etc.. These determine a hierarchically structured system of children’s independent movements; it is differently accessed by children from different social groups; and it generates different outcomes at destinations.

**Figure 3: Ladder of children’s independent movements**



The literature review suggests that where a particular child is located on the ladder – the type of independent movement he/she undertakes – may depend on elements in the migration process described above. Factors related to family circumstances at origins are mediated by intrahousehold preferences and may feed into the child’s preferences (see 1 in Figure 3). The implications of these for the child’s position in the migration ladder, partly depends on broader migration forces shaped by macro-factors. The child’s position in the ladder affects the protections and support available at destination, and the range of links back to family (see 2 and 3 in Figure 3).

<sup>49</sup> This describes a children and youth project in China for internal rural-urban migrants (mainly intra-province). It established linked migrant support systems at origins and destinations, with a view to creating a “safe migration channel”. The project monitors out-bound migration and collects information to ease tracing at destination; encourages children to complete compulsory schooling or to return to school; gives information before migration on labour laws and rights; registers employers and recruiters with the local authority when they come to villages; raises awareness amongst migrants at destination of risks they may face; mediates conflicts between migrants and employers; provides basic services; and monitors and reports abuse and exploitation.

Although left for a separate review, a final step flags the longitudinal importance of children's migration for development. Some adults migrated as children, and their adult development may depend on their development as children (see 4 in Figure 3).

This framework helps question why children from different backgrounds might undertake different forms of independent movements, with potentially different development implications. Further knowledge of the elements in this structure would strengthen the empirical foundations for conceptualising children's independent movements.

Other literature has recognised the need for stronger conceptualisations of children's independent movements. Whitehead and Hashim (2005) emphasise how frameworks designed to prevent child trafficking might actually work against children who migrate independently. This is argued to be because many "positive and negative effects do not arise from the fact of migration itself, but depend on what triggers movement, what kinds of circumstances migrants move to, and of course, the distance moved and the length of stay away" (p. 45). O'Connell, Davidson and Farrow (2007) point to the difficulties in conceptualising independent child migration in the context of current strong assumptions about the sources of vulnerabilities that independent children face. They argue that "we need to ask which children migrate and why, when and why the process of migration puts children at risk, and when and why child migrants are vulnerable... we need to ask whether children who migrate are *inevitably* exposed to risks, or whether their vulnerability is politically and socially constructed" (original italics, p. 22). Bastia (2005) shows how anti-trafficking measures complicate children's movements on the ground, including negotiating low-level corruption and securing employment; and through four case studies of Bolivians in Argentina, questions simple categories of "victims of trafficking" and "normal" labour migrants.

The four phases described above indicate potential development-related influences on children's independent migration. One could intervene at destination by increasing the protections and support for independent migrant children. But as shown in Figure 3, and as suggested by the evidence reviewed, the effectiveness of this would be already constrained by several prior processes. Recall Hulme and Contici (2006) on migrant street children who refused help and Phetsiriseng (2003) on repatriated children in Laos who re-migrated – similar patterns have been noted amongst independent child migrants in OECD contexts. Importantly children's links to their families at origin might be only partially responsive to interventions at destination, being potentially also dependent on other elements of the structural process in Figure 3. In sum, alternative interventions might target earlier processes, taking a more preventative and less curative approach to violations in independent migrant children's rights.

## **5.2 Value of certain types of fieldwork**

Research on the topic has emerged mainly in the past decade, with increasing recognition by anthropologists, child rights lawyers, some geographers, and service-oriented development organisations. More than anything else it has been the voices of migrant children themselves in this research that has shown ('proven') children to be independent migrants. Perspectives

of economists (including child labour economists), development studies and mainstream migration researchers have been mostly absent.

Not surprisingly the disciplinary slant has affected the kinds of research currently available, and its take-up. Some of the basic economics of the issue in terms of financing, remittances, assets and markets remain poorly specified, although these are core concerns in mainstream migration-development debates, thus making engagement with that debate harder. On the other hand, social and cultural meanings and implications of migration have been probed and perhaps treated more rigorously than in mainstream debates.

This review identified 39 pieces of research in developing countries. The search was conducted mainly in English, with searches in Spanish, French and Portuguese done over two months in 1997. Most are on the internet or formally published, and a few were obtained directly from the authors. Although inevitably one or two may have slipped by, the review has included most of the empirical research.

As noted in Table 4, this covers most of the world's regions showing that children's independent migration is a global phenomenon that is not due to a particular cultural practice, but a part of migration forces. On the other hand, the global 'data points' are concentrated on a few countries. This means that there is not sufficient variation represented in the contexts in which children migrate independently (e.g. semi-arid farming risks, health risks, proximity to OECD, GNI/cap, etc.).

**Table 4: Geographical distribution of field studies identified**

<b>UNICEF region</b>	<b>Research country (internal migration) or destination country (international migration)</b>	<b>N</b>
ESA	Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda	10
WCA	Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana	10
EAP	Cambodia, China, Laos, Philippines, Thailand	7
SA	Bangladesh, India, Nepal,	5
TAC	Argentina, Peru	4
CEE/CIS	Albania, Romania	2
Various		1
Total		39

Furthermore, as Table 5 shows, studies with the larger samples sizes are geographically concentrated. Sample sizes were greater than 250 children or families in 16 of the 37 studies, and ranged up to 39,000 children and 4,500 families.

**Table 5: Sample sizes of field studies identified (children or households)**

	<51	51-250	251-500	>500	Total
ESA	1	3	3	3	10
WCA	1	3	2	4	10
EAP	2	3	1	1	7
SA	0	3	0	2	5
TAC	2	1	0	0	3
CEE/CIS	0	1	0	0	1
Various	1	0	0	0	1
Total	7	14	6	10	37

Under 40 per cent of the studies concentrated on migration proper, whilst others picked up on trafficking, street children, child labour, etc. Fourteen used quantitative methods, 14 used qualitative methods and 11 used mixed methods.

By far the most instructive research has been those that have managed to conduct fieldwork at both origins and destinations. This opens up information, analytical cross-checks and opportunities for conceptual grounding that are not possible with research in one place alone. The point is already recognised in the importance of multi-local migration research (Thieme 2008). Many of the most difficult questions, such as interactions between trafficking and children’s independent migration, can be answered reliably only with this type of research.

Six studies did this, covering both origins and destinations, 23 did research at destination only, and 10 did origin only. Remarkably two of the six managed to do cross-border origin-destination research (one rural-urban and one rural-rural). The other four inform about internal migration (two rural-urban, one rural-rural, one rural-various). Sample sizes ranged from 34 to 95 children. Two used mixed qualitative and quantitative methods (others were qualitative), and four started with a localised census, one used purposive sampling and the other used mixed methods.

Clearly methods exist to successfully conduct origin-destination research on independent migrant children, although perhaps the methodologies have not received sufficiently wide appreciation or understanding. This point about mainstreaming into migration research the several methodological innovations in the topic is picked up in the next subsection.

### 5.3 Need to improve statistics and research methods

Mainstream migration-development debates are based on research methods intrinsically unsuited to detect independent child migrants. Innovations in qualitative and quantitative methodologies, reflected in studies reviewed in this paper, remain on the sidelines. The problem shows in how basic official statistics have been defined in ways that assume away independent child migration (discussed in Section 3), and feeds through to the presumption that research on this group of migrants has to be highly specialised (which automatically detaches the topic from mainstream interests).

Research on mobile populations is difficult, and so is research on children living independently. Independent child migrants are both. Possible research challenges are that their migration is undocumented; some children might be unsettled and mobile at destination; children's work in the informal sector is more hidden; independent migrant children and their families at origins may not wish to reveal themselves; migrant children may have complex accommodation arrangements; independent migration children fall outside of the 'household unit' often used for survey sampling.

Pearson et al (2006) describe some of the research challenges in their study in Bangkok and surrounding regions. Difficulty in reaching migrant children differed by sectors. Fishing, manufacturing and domestic work took four months, achieving sample sizes of 117, 130 and 320 migrants; agriculture took 6 weeks for a sample size of 129. Interviews were mainly in the workplace or in living quarters. Many employers refused access, but agreed to telephone interviews instead. Employers were interviewed at the same time as the children to ensure confidentiality. Labour recruiters, employers and unregistered employees were much harder to access. Access was partly due to the time demands of being interviewed (30 minutes required), and language. Police are sometimes involved in recruitment and transport of migrants, and on one occasion police visited migrants directly after the survey team.

### **Analogy with child labour research**

The current poor state of research on children's independent migration seems similar child labour research around 15 years ago. Statistical knowledge on child labour was built through the gradual development and testing of survey instruments and survey methods suitable for researching children, for example through the ILO's Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour. Now there is a clearer definition of what is "acceptable" and "unacceptable" children's economic activity (termed by the ILO as 'child work' and 'child labour', respectively), and statistics on child labour exist alongside those for acceptable child economic activity.

This research helped policy development in that early (naïve) attempts to simply 'stamp out!' child labour through normative global campaigns have given way to more effective policies that combine legal standards with knowledge on economic incentives and social contexts. A similar effort is needed on independent child migration, such as to situate unacceptable forms of children's independent movement (viz. trafficking) within the whole set of children's independent movements.

The comparison is instructive because it would seem just as challenging to locate and access child workers, as it is independent child migrants. And yet it has been done at large enough sample sizes for extremely useful global estimates to be derived. Moreover, as discussed below, independent migrant children are mostly working, and thus in large measure it is the same children under consideration. Potentially adaptable survey methods that might yield sound statistics might therefore be available. Lessons from child labour surveys are being mainstreamed into national labour surveys so that specialised child surveys are less needed, and this approach could be employed in migration surveys.

Survey methods aside, the increasing research experience in the topic has generated methods that emphasise child-friendliness, children's participation, combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, retrospective collection of children's life histories, and research ethics.

Reviewed already:

- the Tanzania study accessed child migrants through probability sampling after listing operations (Liviga and Mekacha 1998);
- the Cambodia study accessed substantial numbers of homes with migrant child domestic workers with its research protocols (Brown 2007);
- the Ugandan study located children through NGOs and respected older youth (Young 2004);
- Ethiopia study fielded a large survey instrument in slum areas (Erulkar et al. 2006);
- the sample for the Mae Sot study was obtained within a two month period (FTUB 2006), and the Nepal/India study in a three month period (Adhikari and Pradhan 2005);
- the Zambia study located 1150 street children in two months (Lemba 2002);
- a South African study stopped interviews after two weeks, noting that many more migrant children could have been located easily (SCF 2007);
- the study of street children in Dhaka devised methods to help children report an estimate of monthly income of their household at the time they left home, household size, year they left home, number of meals they used to have, electricity connection, household durables, furniture, jobs of the income earners, seasonality of jobs, and ownership of land and livestock (Conticini and Hulme 2006);
- the Karnataka study surveyed at origins in 21 villages, and then traced 95 migrant children at destinations (Iversen 2002);
- in Mali, Hatloy and Huser (2005) applied the 'capture-recapture method' to estimate overall scale, and used 'respondent-driven or snowball sampling' to increase sample sizes.<sup>50</sup>

### **Cottage industry**

Research into independent child migration is a 'cottage industry' far removed from major migration research launched recently (e.g. the multi-partner *Development on the Move* project, which features new large-sample migration surveys in 12 countries).<sup>51</sup> These programmes are shaping knowledge-gathering on migration-development linkages. A major barrier is weakness on the topic in organisations normally crucial to mounting global research and debates on development. With the exception of the ILO in the Mekong,

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<sup>50</sup> McKenzie and Mistiaen (2007) compare three sampling methods applied to adult migrants: 1/ random sampling from census lists, 2/ respondent-driven sampling, and 3/ intercept-point sampling at places where migrants gather. Each of these methods has been applied to children (see discussion of quantitative studies on Ethiopia for type 1, Ghana for type 2 and Tanzania for type 3). McKenzie and Mistiaen note that based on their Brazilian data, the cost of a sample size of 500 using type 1 sampling was \$142,000, using type 2 \$67,000 and using type 3 \$20,100. But type 2 and type 3 samples may not be representative and may introduce biases in estimates; and type 3 is generally limited to shorter questionnaires.

<sup>51</sup> See <http://www.gdnet.org/middle.php?oid=1214>, accessed 17 December 2008.

intergovernmental organisations were not involved in a major way in the studies reviewed; and few, including UNICEF, are yet to support substantial field-based enquiry into the topic.

Most studies are by researchers with individual grants or by NGOs. This reinforces the misperception that overly specialised approaches are required. The scale of research and its impact on global debates must be at least partly a function of the scale of *researchers* involved. It is not clear if research into independent child migration would be any more expensive or time consuming or methodologically challenging than general migration research, or as mentioned already, child labour research. It is clear from the review that conceptual progress in trafficking research needs far stronger empirical knowledge on the development issues involved in children's independent movements. It is also likely that children's independent migration is connected to major development agendas, such as education, water and sanitation (and its household health implications), HIV and food security.

### **Missing positives**

More than sample size problems or devising methods, another research challenge is perhaps larger. As discussed earlier, research on independent child migration lacks serious consideration of the positives in the process. Locating that 'missing part' of the variance of outcomes may be difficult in that successful independent migrant children might be less apparent than unsuccessful ones (e.g. they would not be living in the streets, or be flagged by NGO service providers, etc.).

Punch (2007d) argues that the positioning of children's independent migration parallels development literature in general where children have been largely invisible until relatively recently. Since the 1990s children have begun to be more considered in relation to their active contribution to development, but again the initial focus was on children with special protection needs, such as child prostitutes, child soldiers, street children, child labourers and child slaves. This has contributed to an over-emphasis on popular conceptualisations of the exploited nature of childhoods in developing countries.

A challenge remains to design research with a sample of independent child migrants with a sufficiently broad variation in their situations at destination, broad variations in their backgrounds at origin, and at sufficient sample sizes to allow some degree of statistical insight, in addition to qualitative questions.<sup>52</sup>

## **5.4 Need for research on children's labour-market migration**

Children's independent migration is linked to labour markets, but this is not well addressed in the child work/labour literature (following ILO distinctions between children's work and labour).<sup>53</sup> As mentioned already, little of the economics of the issue has been addressed.

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<sup>52</sup> A first step to documenting the 'missing variance' in outcomes could be to study adults who migrated as children. Bastia (2005) did this with life histories of a small sample (N=38), showing benefits and drawbacks of independent child migration. The approach could be applied to larger datasets.

<sup>53</sup> ILO Conventions 138 and 182 stipulate that except for schooling and chores in the child's own household, children 12 years and older can perform certain light work a few hours per week; and children 15 years and

Research is needed that recognises independent child migrant's economic contributions, its potentials and risks, and its opportunity costs for the children and for the communities they leave behind.

The separation in research of children's migration and their work/labour seems artificial given that independent child migrants are economically active (whether paid or not). This is likely even when the primary motive for migration is not employment, such as intra-family conflict, because living apart from their immediate families means most independent child migrants have to assume greater responsibility for their livelihoods.

Two kinds of overlaps would seem to be immediately apparent between the two literatures.

### **Migration participation rates and causes**

Both literatures seek to understand the influence of children's origins. Literature on child work/labour often frames this as factors influencing children's entry into four alternative activities (school, work/labour, both and neither), whereas independent child migration literature frames this as factors leading to children's physical movements independently from the family. Various child-level, family-level and community factors are analysed as baseline conditions or triggers. Given that physically leaving close-family increases children's dependence on themselves for their livelihoods (and possibly vice versa) it is likely that the two issues are jointly-determined to some degree.

Important questions could be asked through the child labour lens, such as when children's participation in work/labour results in their independent migration, rather than their local work/labour? This could consider whether the drivers of children's entry into work/labour might be similar or different if migration is involved (such as depending on the size or permanence of a shock on the child's family); and whether conditions at the levels of child, family or community may affect whether migration is involved or not (such as the child's age, or proximity to urban areas).

A strong linkage could be to illness and death of household members. Death of a family breadwinner is seen as a potential trigger for participation in both literatures. Illness and death may have distinct effects, by raising different chronic and transitory pressures on families. Other potential linkages could be to poverty and poverty-shocks,<sup>54</sup> access to productive assets (especially land and irrigation),<sup>55</sup> access to assets that protect household human capital (especially clean water and sanitation),<sup>56</sup> varied notions around children's

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older can work if it is not hazardous for safety, physical or mental health, or moral development. All other work is child labour.

<sup>54</sup> For example, Guarcello, L., I. Kovrova, and F. C. Rosati (2007). 'Child Labour as a Response to Shocks: Evidence from Cambodian Villages'. *Working Paper* 38, UCW Project, Rome; Beegle, Kathleen, Rajeev H. Dehejia, Roberta Gatti (2006), 'Child Labour and Agricultural Shocks', *Journal of Development Economics* V81, pp. 80-96; Duryea, Suzanne and Mary Arends-Kuenning (2003). 'School Attendance, Child Labor and Local Labor Market Fluctuations in Urban Brazil', *World Development* V31, N7, pp. 1165-1178.

<sup>55</sup> Woldehanna, Tassew, Nicola Jones, Bekele Tefera (2008). 'The Invisibility of Children's Paid and Unpaid Work: Implications for Ethiopia's National Poverty Reduction Policy.' *Childhood* V15, pp. 177-201

<sup>56</sup> Guarcello, L., S. Lyon and F. Rosati (2004). 'Child Labour and Access to Basic Services: Evidence from Five Countries'. *Working Paper* 6, UCW Project, Rome

work/labour,<sup>57</sup> connections to adult work,<sup>58</sup> availability of schools,<sup>59</sup> and proximity to markets.<sup>60</sup>

### **Workplaces and migrant destinations**

A second overlap between migration literature and child labour literature is in children's resulting contexts and well-being. Migration literature often includes descriptions of children's workplaces and employment conditions at destinations. In largely separate research, the child work/labour literature offers evidence on similar themes through its sector and country studies. Given that many migrant children find themselves in work/labour, the two literatures concern some of the same children. Whereas one literature focuses on physical movement from the family for understanding children's well-being, the other focuses on work/labour conditions.

One important difference is that the child work/labour literature has fairly good surveys and larger-sample approaches. This provides opportunity for richer evidence on independent migrant children's situations at destinations through review of empirical child work/labour literature. The migration literature suggests domestic work, farming, plantations, mining, and urban informal sector services have large numbers of independent migrant children.

This also offers the opportunity to consider interactions between children's employment and their physical departure from the family (such as, if leaving the family increases the chances of entering more exploitative labour, or whether distinctions might exist between internal and international migrants). For example Kielland (2008) reports children's time use in Benin, finding that the average work day for 6-17 year olds not in school is 50 per cent longer for children living away from biological parents than with. A correlation between children away from home and child labour was noted above for Uganda; another factor was children's relationships to adults with whom they reside (ILO 2004).

There is also opportunity to consider how labour-market incentives at destination may pull children into migration, such as training, career progression, remittances and schooling linked to employment. What characteristics of different employment sectors, such as greater involvement in the informal sector, criminality or aspects of the production process, might increase a particular sector's demand for, and absorption of, migrant children, compared to other employment sectors? Why do migrant children seem to concentrate in certain employment sectors? Is there any evidence that migrant children are different in terms of

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<sup>57</sup> For example, Moore, Karen (2000), 'Supporting Children in their Working Lives: Obstacles and Opportunities Within the International Policy Environment', *Journal of International Development*, V12, pp. 531-548; ILO (2007), *Modern Policy and Legislative Responses to Child Labour*, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, ILO, Geneva.

<sup>58</sup> For example, Ray, Ranjan, 2000, 'Child Labor, Child Schooling and their Interaction with Adult Labor', *World Bank Economic Review* V14 N2, pp.347-67

<sup>59</sup> For example, Bissell, Susan and Ernesto Schiefelbein, 2003, *Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor: Using Economic and Education Incentives*, Office for Education, USAID; Ersado, Lire (2002), 'Child Labor and School Decisions in Urban and Rural Areas: Cross Country Evidence'. *FCND Discussion Paper* 145, IFPRI, Washington D.C.

<sup>60</sup> For example, Fafchamps, Marcel and Wahba, Jackline, (2006), 'Child Labor, Urban Proximity and Household Composition', *Discussion Paper* No. 1966, IZA, Bonn.

their workplace conditions, living arrangements or other issues? The quantitative section reported age and sex differentiation in migrant children's occupations.

These characteristics could be influential in how the economic pull of a sector translates into children's spatial locations. For example, if the child work/labour content in agriculture is increasingly involved in agricultural processing, this would suggest a tendency towards small towns and cities, but if the child work/labour content is mainly smaller tasks on farms, then rural locations would be more likely. Living arrangements and family transactions may affect children's spatial locations given that, except for a small proportion that runaway, most independent child migrants maintain connections to their families.

## **5.5 Seasonality and the temporal dimension**

One under-researched issue is seasonality in the timing of children's departures and returns. Seasonal migration has been researched, but in the case of children the issue might differ to some extent, in not being just about annual migratory circuits. Seasonality in fluctuating capacities of families to bear their dependency ratios, for example, might affect when children try for independence through migration, and also affect how they go about it. In certain periods, migration might be harder to organise well.

The basics of food and employment are prone to seasonal effects in large parts of the developing world. Agriculture and migration are closely tied due to farming cycles; and secondly, some 70 per cent of working children are in agriculture (ILO 2007). Subsistence farming families experience seasons of hunger, shortage and economic liquidity problems.<sup>61</sup> If a seasonal downswing in demand for children's local agricultural employment coincides with the hungry season, the consequent combination of children's employment insecurity and food insecurity may lead to increased children's independent migration to other zones. Brick-making, fishing and rickshaw driving are other seasonally-affected sectors that employ children.

Kabir et al. (2008) applied seasonal calendar methodologies with migrants in Bangladesh (some of whom were children or adults who migrated as children). Generally migrants were pushed by food shortage and low employment at places of origin from August to October, and pulled by greater earnings potential and employment at destinations during harvesting from November to January. They found that high and low seasons for work migration varied by occupational and wealth groups. They also found migration in certain seasons was more rewarding because of the general seasonal buoyancy of destination markets. This adds seasons as another potential dimension to the 'migration ladder' presented earlier to qualitatively differentiate various forms of children's independent movements.

Orgocka and Jasini (2007) found that summer months were preferred for children to migrate. A police official commented: "It is in the summer season when the child has finished school and does not have the institutional supervision that school offers. The end of the school creates possibilities for children to leave since they do not have other activities to carry out

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<sup>61</sup> Links between hunger and trafficking have been noted also; see for example, concerns in Cambodia of the impact of the sharp increase in food and fuel prices in 2008, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=80427>.

except herding. In that case they often think: if I have to herd, I better go and work abroad. The summer is also preferred since there are high temperatures and it is warm enough to stay outside” (p. 23).

Adhikan and Pradhan (2005) found variations over a three month period in the outflows of children from Nepal to India. Half crossed in July, a third in August and the rest in September. Adhikan and Pradhan argue that children’s migration in food-deficit communities is affected by the need to work in the lean period between planting and harvesting. They argued that however July-September may be a low migration season any case because of the need to be at home for paddy planting and two Nepali festivals. Many subsistence farmers spend part of the year at home, and part of the year where they can find wage labour.

Amongst Bolivian independent child migrants, Punch (2007c) found seasonal movement linked to labour-market dynamics and social festivals. In the dry months (May-October), work at home is scarce and highly competitive, and Argentina offers additional opportunities. Departures are mainly between March and May, and returns are after harvests in Argentina in November and December, with timing close to festivals back home. At destination, life revolves around work, but when at home, the children may consider themselves on holiday and work little. Bastia (2005) noted similar points in her research on Bolivian child migrants in Argentina.

Adiihou and Fanou-ako (2000) found villagers reported links between seasonality and children’s independent movements in Benin and Gabon. One villager reported: “Recruitment is generally carried out during the agricultural lean season (October-February). It also happens that the children give up the school, or that the parents stop their schooling to send them abroad.”<sup>62</sup> A parent reported: “Now the harvest is finished, there are no more jobs. Insufficient harvests do not enable us to have money on the side. It is better to send a child with somebody who can find work for him/her. We do that to solve the problem of unemployment of children and especially so that they can help us, and be better than we who remain in misery here. It is true that people who come looking for children give us a little money. That helps us a little to pass the lean season which is more difficult than the remainder of the year.”<sup>63</sup>

## **5.6 Non-random selection of migrants**

A fundamental issue not yet explicitly considered is that independent child migration is likely to be an endogenous process. Independent child migration may be selective on certain child, family and community characteristics. The issue is implicit in much of the evidence presented, such in discussions on constraints on children’s decision-making. As discussed

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<sup>62</sup> Le recrutement s’effectue généralement pendant la morte saison agricole (Octobre-Février). Il arrive aussi que les enfants abandonnent l’école, ou que les parents interrompent leur scolarité pour les envoyer à l’étranger. (Cotonou, Octobre 1998).

<sup>63</sup> A partir de maintenant, une fois les récoltes finies, il n’y a plus d’activités. Les récoltes insuffisantes ne nous permettent pas d’avoir de l’argent à côté. C’est mieux d’envoyer un enfant avec quelqu’un qui peut lui trouver du travail. Nous faisons cela pour résoudre le problème de non emploi des enfants et surtout pour qu’ils puissent nous aider et être mieux que nous qui restons dans la misère ici. C’est vrai que les gens qui viennent chercher les enfants nous donnent un peu d’argent. Cela nous aide un peu à passer la saison morte qui est plus difficile que le reste de l’année. (Mono, October 1998).

below, more explicit research recognising the selectivity of children's independent migration would help draw out some of its development implications, first in terms of the migrants themselves at destinations (child protection) and secondly in terms of places of origins (including poverty and inequality reduction).

### **Rights and protections at destinations**

If independent child migrants are markedly different from a random cross-section of the child population, then comparing migrant and non-migrant children may not give a reliable picture on the impact of migration. From a children's rights perspective, it raises the question of understanding whether children's rights are at risk because they migrate, or whether they migrate because their rights are at risk. Clearly the empirical importance of this distinction depends on how endogenous children's independent migration is in a given reality. This does not necessarily have to be the same everywhere or over time (for example, public policies or economic development may alter it).

The issue has a practical implication in terms of effects of potential programmes or policy interventions towards migrants. If one assumes children's rights are at risk because they migrate, but the reality is more about children migrating because their rights are at risk, then one would over-estimate the protection and development support provided by interventions at destinations. In some sense, this might already be indicated in the observations by several authors that reunifying children with families would be unsuccessful for many children because children re-migrate, and this is echoed in the statements of some children with migration experience.

### **Poverty and inequality at origins**

A second open research question is whether children's independent migration is differently endogenous to adult migration. If so, children's independent migration may select on slightly different households. Such households may be somehow more constrained in their adult migration (given the choice presumably more families would prefer adult migrants as better able to reap migration rewards); and/or these are households somehow more constrained in the intergenerational opportunities they offer children (given the choice presumably more children would prefer work/ school at home). This might explain why in some households, facing migration incentives/ disincentives similar to other households, it is the *adults* who are left behind.

Poverty in income and non-income dimensions, and its intergenerational links, would seem to be a main factor (and as noted already, is cited by migrant children, and as discussed below, is raised in research, albeit inadequately). An explanation of why and how poverty selects independent child migrants needs to consider how migration incentives/ disincentives are translated to individuals within families. Recalling an earlier discussion, understanding the diversity of individual-level migration needs to account better for biological and social distinctiveness of children and childhood (as well as gender), because these frame children's needs and abilities; and this distinctiveness was indicated in survey evidence presented on migration patterns, and in qualitative evidence presented on migration decision-making. This may be important for how children's independent migration may inform migration-development debates in terms of its implications for poverty and inequality. It is widely

supposed in mainstream migration debates – almost taken as universal fact – the poor cannot migrate, because they lack sufficient resources, knowledge and social networks to overcome the barriers to migration, such as transport costs, paperwork, border controls, and social and economic dislocation.<sup>64</sup> This is a crucial point, because if the poor migrate less than the non-poor, or do so under less favourable terms, then the benefits of migration are skewed away from the poor, and so migration may increase inequalities and be less directly poverty-reducing.

Empirical studies on whether the poor migrate have approached the question by looking at migration rates at different levels of household income, expenditures or assets. The evidence is mixed (some studies find no relationship). A firm conclusion is further difficult because mostly the analytical approach correlates migration rates with household situations at time of survey, i.e. post-migration, rather than the time of migration (due to obvious data problems). If migration is an effective response to poverty, even by simply increasing the ratio of workers to dependents in the family, then the situation at origins may improve post-migration, and thus show lower migration rates amongst the poor.<sup>65</sup>

The research isolation of children's independent migration has meant there has been no consideration in mainstream literature that migration by individual children of the poor may be a response by families otherwise constrained in opportunities. Much of children's independent migration is undocumented or into the unregulated domestic informal sector, and is embedded in various child-specific social practices that facilitate movement. These all decrease barriers to migration. Migrant children may find low-wage work and unpaid subsistence activities where migrant adults could not with their higher 'reservation wages'.

Independent child migration may help understand whether participation in migration by poor families is truly lower, or whether it is merely unrecognised in analysis and statistics because of the forms it takes. Undocumented migration and internal migration are massively under-researched, where poor families and poor children may participate more. Overlooking the activities of the poor has happened in other topics of development research, such as the long-standing view preceding microfinance, that the poor were 'unbankable' (see Yaqub 1998 for review). This assumed the poor did not want or were unable to use financial services, a general perspective that parallels current assumptions in migration, but which in the case of finance was proved false when research showed how the poor work around their constraints, largely outside the mainstream radar (such as in informal 'rotating' schemes, traders, interlinked finance and farming contracts, etc.). Far greater poor-relevant approaches are needed to understand the effects of migration on poverty and inequality than has been offered in current migration-development debates, and independent child migration suggests that a starting point for this is to address the weak gender and lifestage awareness in migration research.

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<sup>64</sup> For reviews see Waddington and Sabates-Wheeler (2003) and de Haan and Yaqub (2007).

<sup>65</sup> Sabates-Wheeler et al. (2007), using data from Ghanaian return international migrants, found that those poor prior to migration were less likely to migrate documented, and that in turn, documented migrants were more likely to have experienced upward income mobility. Other determinants of documented migration were education levels (more likely), being male (less likely), being African (less likely) and having help at origin (more likely). Documented migration is complex: different documents are needed in different countries, and at different stages of the process. Work permits need money, time and the cooperation of employers.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS: CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND COUNTRY DEVELOPMENT**

The paper presented evidence on independent child migration in developing countries, and situated it within themes drawn from development studies. A running conclusion from the review is the neglect in mainstream migration research of this group of migrants, and the lack of interest and awareness in exploring its migration-development linkages. The assumption seems to be that these are ‘children’, and the only issues their migration can raise is ‘vulnerability’ and ‘protection needs’.

Whilst this is a major aspect of the issue, and indeed child protection is a necessary aspect of development, the review has also shown that children’s agency and purposes as migrants can make sense within the constrained options of some realities in developing countries, and potentially has positive and negative development implications for the children themselves, the places they leave behind and their places of destinations. Knowledge on the content and form of relevant development frameworks, policies and interventions is lacking. This final section draws on the evidence and reflects on implications for the interconnected issues of, first child development (as independent migrants) and secondly country development (at origins and destinations).

### **6.1 Child development and migration-development linkages**

A major contribution of the literature has been to establish that independent child migration exists. As a new research topic, evidence has emerged strongly in the past decade. This is important because official data and information collection efforts are almost non-existent.

#### **Conceptualising children’s movements**

Until recently trafficking, asylum-seeking or forced situations, rather than migration, were automatically thought of as accounting for children’s movements to places without parents or adult guardians. By giving voice to children and their families, research reported in this paper reveals degrees of some children’s agency, independent motives and organisation of movements. For many children, their movement is not under duress, deception or force, at least not any more than adults from similar places of low development. Such children are not trafficked or asylum-seekers, but resemble economic migrants, or seek non-economic opportunities, or see migration as a useful transition stage, or are purposefully escaping dangers at home.

Whilst children may be seen as agents to some extent, at the same time, children’s choice-sets are differently constrained and decided upon than adults, and this is where existing knowledge is weaker. Abstract ideas about children’s agency need better-grounded empirical bases. Some ‘options’ to migrate would seem more child-specific, and others more adult-specific; children’s understandings and abilities are different to adults; and children’s scope for ‘independence’ is limited under law and social norms, because the same laws and social norms commit to protect and promote children as dependents (either of adults, or of the State).

Moreover, children's choice-sets in migration, much like life generally, are intergenerationally transmitted via their parental socioeconomic positions, and often additionally depend on children's intra-household positions as individuals. Both were identified in the literature as having shaped independent child migration, with children reporting migration for accumulation and future-seeking. Intergenerational and intrahousehold aspects of inequality have received little attention in migration-development literature, but are probably central factors in migration decisions and patterns, as these aspects of inequalities are the least addressed by community measures or public policies in rural areas of developing countries.

Inequality breeds inequality, and so the migration process is likely to be unequal. Social-economic inequality amongst children is likely to influence differences across children in migration motives and organisation, modes of movement and migration outcomes. It is likely to explain better the huge variations in children's independent movements, which has been until now noted mainly descriptively, as if the variations had occurred randomly. As discussed, a difficulty in this is the lack of explicit research recognition that children's independent migration is likely to be endogenous, with limited understanding on factors that select families, and individuals within families, in independent child migration. This restricts understanding of the impact on children, and also its implications for poverty and inequality.

Understanding not only the choices, but also the choice-sets, in children's independent migration remains a crucial research challenge. These are empirical questions requiring comparative field research in varied contexts. The necessary balanced policy perspectives will not be possible with conceptual and theoretical debate alone. There is a need to document how independent migrant children's agency relates to development through their social and economic contributions, and the limits of this given the harmful experiences children can face.

Research on this is evolving. As discussed in the paper, methods developed in independent child migration research could be better mainstreamed in migration research so that the knowledge gathering efforts underway in migration-development debates can be more inclusive. In some areas, such as basic migration statistics, the changes could be relatively easy. In other areas, greater assessment and synthesis is needed of what has been learnt methodologically in this topic that can have broader application for migration research.

### **Non-migrant labels and low visibility**

Many children are not recognised as migrants because their situations are labelled with non-migrant terms, such as domestic workers or street children. Such children are independently living and working, albeit perhaps within child-specific social constructs. Sometimes the social embedded-ness of the movement may add to this, such as in child fostering, orphans or early child marriage. This relates to the conceptualisation of children's independent movements and what it represents (for example, in noticing the potential 'labour migration' content of some early child marriage).

In summary seven non-migrant labels may apply to children who migrate independently:

- Various job titles

- Street children (those not with families on the streets)
- Informally fostered children (with and without surviving parent)
- Early-married children (away from the family)
- Orphans (lacking adult guardian)
- Runaways (who do not want to be in contact with their families)
- Child-headed households composed of siblings and other children

Whether this labelling issue has any practical importance for the children involved, beyond low recognition in migration debates, depends on how children differ by migration status, such as between local street children and migrant street children. This requires clearer assessment of causal effects on children's well-being due to independent movement. Part of the research challenge here is to understand how the process is structured (as hypothesised earlier). It also needs a more explicit recognition that independent child migrants may be endogenously selected.

### **Positive outcomes and incentives**

Research on independent child migrants at destinations show they are in really varied situations, and often with (or deserving of) high development priority. Almost all work, in some form or other. Many migrated for schooling, but most are not in school. Many live with relatives or employers, but do not receive the protection and support they are entitled to.

Whilst the research has indicated immediate needs of independent child migrants, it is weaker in answering deeper questions. If children's independent migration is entirely harmful, as one would gather from much of the discussion, then why do children do it?

The notion of misinformed agents needs more than the largely anecdotal evidence it has received. Research reported in the paper shows many children migrate independently several times (and so know the destination), many re-migrate after being repatriated many times, and statements by children and parents suggest a degree of informed decision-making, such as knowledge of jobs and conditions.

Incentives in children's independent migration remain unclear largely because the positives of migration have been under-emphasised in the case of independent migrant children.

Mainly 'soft' social incentives, such as the 'glitter' of destinations, peer-influence or lack of information, are emphasised rather than the specific goals that migrant children seem to report, such as human capital accumulation through schooling and skills development; asset accumulation and independent income generation that children feel are needed for their transitions into adulthood; and basic consumption, livelihoods and remittances back to family. As research reviewed in this paper shows, many children see labour migration as having improved their intrahousehold positions, that their care contexts are highly negotiated with the social-economic realities of their origins, and that migration is often a consequence (not cause) of limited education opportunities.

## **Child protection and rights-based migration**

There has been growing appreciation that migration within rights-based frameworks is a necessary part of strengthening migration-development linkages. Child protection, and in particular prevention of child trafficking, is a necessary aspect of this. If migration results only in children's exploitation, then the prevention of trafficking is sufficient in that it attempts to stop the movement of children that results in harm. The difficulty is that this framework for children's rights is widely seen to be *insufficient* for those children whose independent movement is due to their seeking benefits from migration. But this is essentially where the research has got to so far.

Children have special protections under the UN *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*. In the case of children, evidence of facilitated movement for exploitation is considered sufficient for trafficking to have occurred, and it is not necessary to prove duress, deception, abduction, etc.. A child's consent is irrelevant in this definition, but both facilitation and exploitation are necessary. This means an exploited child is not defined as trafficked if nobody facilitated movement, i.e. exploitation occurred locally or the child moved under the child's arrangements. Also a child whose movement has been facilitated cannot be defined as trafficked if he/she is not defined as exploited.

These raise empirical questions, such as the importance of the categories (facilitation without exploitation, exploitation without facilitation, independent movement with neither); complications in identifying facilitation (especially within the family) and exploitation (especially under local interpretations of childhood); and, as raised in the paper, variations in these by place and by developmental stage. However the review showed that many – perhaps most – independent movements of children do not fall into easy categories, and this was revealed by both the qualitative and quantitative research.

Trafficking always involves criminals by definition, and as such is a zero tolerance concept. The definition of trafficking is useful for protecting children in many exploitative situations by unpacking a sometimes complicated process with criminal actors. But it deserves further attention in clarifying how the prevention of trafficking is not the same as prevention of migration, and in clarifying its practical application where facilitation and exploitation are more ambiguous (perhaps because of a combination of social norms, child-age, children's alternatives, and the nature of the particular work, especially in non-sexual employment). The *ex post* nature of the definition of trafficking means that prevention of trafficking is often taken to be synonymous with prevention of children's movement, rather than prevention of exploitation. If children were not exploited, they could move and their movement could be facilitated, and it would not be trafficking.

Research has not yet shown how independent migrant children's views and agency can be practically reflected into rights-based migration policies, or responded to in a safe, substantial and supportive way. It seems some balanced perspective needs to be developed around the respect of the rights of independent child migrants as migrants as well as children. Little of the on-going efforts to develop a rights-based migration framework address these issues.

There is limited knowledge on how to support children who seek to stay independent to pursue their development goals through migration. It could be seen as condoning children's labour; or supporting children's movement into uncertain care contexts; or promoting children's moves away from their parents; or undermining children's education. Indeed if not well informed, policies might turn out to fulfil some of these dangers.

Migrant children are vulnerable to many forms of harm. This is partly because children are more vulnerable, partly because of the general vulnerability of migrants, and partly because independent migrant children are often undocumented. The considerations need to include internal independent child migrants too, whose issues have little to do with immigration. Also, it needs to consider resources and capacity of developing *destination* countries, such as in meeting their duties under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Almost all legal rights research on independent migrant children has concerned immigration systems in OECD countries, thus leaving out the overwhelming majority who are internal migrants or have gone to developing countries.

Current thinking and action has fallen into two main types: a *communication approach* that essentially aims to inform children and parents out of independent child migration by focusing on its dangers and costs; and a *legal approach* that assumes all independent movements by children are due to criminal activity, and aims to apprehend the criminals and return children home. The literature convincingly shows these approaches are only partially relevant. Health research has reached a similar conclusion, with greater recognition of the need for mixed policies based on more rigorous behavioural frameworks: "...teenagers face considerable risk to their reproductive health from unintended pregnancy and infections, including HIV. Abstinence from sexual intercourse, while theoretically fully protective, often fails to protect in practice because abstinence is not maintained" (Santelli et al. 2006, p.83). Abstinence from migration faces parallel challenges.

A third *social-economic approach*, that has received less attention, would identify incentives/disincentives driving the process, and seek to offer alternatives that can improve children's outcomes. To do this, linkages to societal development need to be better understood. This would recognise the massive inequality in social-economic well-being and prospects that exists within countries, and across countries.<sup>66</sup> It would explore the connections between children's independent migration and development in a much broader sense, including healthiness and longevity (because of effects on parental investments in children), water and sanitation (because of connections to health shocks and human capital), and land reform and agricultural development (because of connections to livelihoods, food security and poverty dynamics) – and this would accept that migration and development are mutually reinforcing processes (Castles 2008). It would map how low, unequal development influences children's

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<sup>66</sup> For example, if the world's entire population was placed in a single 'borderless' income distribution, 60 per cent of the variability in people's global income positions (percentile in world income distribution) is explained by one characteristic: the country where they live; another 30 per cent is explained by internal inequality (Milanovic 2008).

independent migration, and in turn, recognise that individual development of migrants is a major influence on the contributions migrants make at societal levels.<sup>67</sup>

Greater knowledge on this can substantially re-cast the challenging issue of children's agency in their independent movements, and the migration-trafficking nexus. A strong theme in the qualitative literature is the value placed by parents and children on children's 'independence'. Yet, it seems that children seek independence at relatively early ages only in a world in which economic security disappears early. In other places, it is worthwhile for both children and parents for the children to remain as dependents. This happened partly in the two-way interaction between migration and development that occurred in the historical transformation of today's rich societies. It has created a minority world where children rarely migrate independently, but have more of the elements needed for them to reach their potential, whilst benefiting from the company, care and nurture of their families and communities.

Some forms of children's agency in their independent movements clearly lead children into great harm, and need to be addressed. Duress, deception and force are likely counterparts in these situations, and the limited choice-sets of such children need to be expanded and the criminals who exploit them apprehended. On the other hand, some forms of children's agency are clearly developmental, and preventing the independent movements of such children will likely drive them underground, consign them to fewer life opportunities and undermine societal development and growth. Drawing on the review, children whose motives fall into accumulation and 'future-seeking' would seem to have these developmental forms of agency; additionally, so might many children whose migration as part of their intra-family roles, because their migration may be a component of the migration strategies of their families.

## **6.2 Developing countries and independent child migration**

Children's independent migration is documented in practically all global regions. The quantitative review showed independent child migration is a large phenomenon in many poor and middle income countries. This is far greater than the hundreds and thousands in Europe and North America (see, for example, UNHCR 2004). Perspectives from Europe and North America dominate the topic, and considerably distort the global picture on its development significance.

Migration into Europe and North America is harder, including for undocumented migrants, and so independent migrant children are fewer, and possibly have different characteristics (older, less poor, better connected, different migration motives, etc.). Europe and North America have more comprehensive child protection systems, and so a child's immigration status can hold tangible benefits that may not exist in developing countries. In developing countries, the net effect may be to shift children from urban slums to refugee camps with equally few opportunities, services and protections; or to repatriate children who simply re-migrate (as in the Laos and South African studies reviewed). As noted already, weaker social security systems in developing countries intensify lifecycle pressures on labour supply/

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<sup>67</sup> See for example, the research project by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development on *Social Policy and Migration in Developing Countries*, which is studying how social policy can be a powerful instrument to foster economic development, social inclusion, cohesion and human rights.

demand. In Europe and North America, children rarely work for survival but do so for experience or training, and Europe and North America have smaller informal economies, the bulk of which is organised criminal activity, quite different to the complexity of informal sector jobs in developing countries.

As part of internal migration, independent child migration contributes to urbanisation and informal sector growth in developing countries. But also rural to rural migration into farming, plantations and fisheries is important. International independent child migration is mostly undocumented or irregular. Another probably important type is international rural to rural migration across bordering countries. Some developing countries can receive children from very long distances (such as South Asian children in Thailand; sub-Saharan African children in Morocco; and South American children in Mexico).

Children's independent migration relates to migration-development debates by showing less visible (and more vulnerable) groups of migrants. In particular these groups may have strong connections to major unfinished global development agendas, such as on poverty, child labour, street children and education for all. For example, despite long-standing commitments to universal provision, one-in-five children of primary school age are out of school, and 80 per cent live in rural areas (UNESCO 2005).<sup>68</sup> Of the ILO's 'minimum estimate' of forced labour, 40-50 per cent are children (Belser et al. 2005).<sup>69</sup>

By moving people around, migration is altering the structure of families, as well as structures of production and consumption. Whilst it is true that economic factors are major drivers of migration, the process involves highly diverse people, including girls, boys, women, men, and better-off and poorer people. The social aspects of this diversity are important for understanding potentials, vulnerabilities and resiliencies in migrant populations. As reviewed, independent child migration may improve understandings of connections between migration and poverty/ inequality; undocumented and irregular migration; and human capital dynamics of migrants (since many independent child migrants are future adult migrants).

It is important also for development implications for places of origins, including how migration affects poverty and inequality, and understanding why it is children and not adults who appear to migrate from many families. The research isolation of children's independent migration has meant there has been no consideration in mainstream literature that migration by individual children of the poor may be a response by poor families otherwise constrained in opportunities to migrate, and by poor children otherwise constrained in opportunities to escape intergenerational poverty.

For families, the development purpose would seem to be to enhance children's productive activities, and perhaps more importantly, move children's consumption demands out of the household. Consumption management, and not only production, is a strategy in poor

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<sup>68</sup> Children are considered out of school if they had no exposure to school during the school year in question. All other children are considered to be participating in school if they attended at any point during the reference period, no matter to what extent they were absent or whether they later dropped out.

<sup>69</sup> Following ILO Conventions 29 and 105, which define forced labour as all work or service exacted under the menace of penalty and not offered voluntarily, 12.3 million people are estimated to be in forced labour, of which a fifth are estimated to have been trafficked.

households. Whilst generally adult family members would be more productive than children in migrant labour markets, children might migrate to become self-sufficient in their consumption and improve the dependency ratio in the remaining family. Adolescents would seem to be prime candidates, but in stressed households or under certain cultural practices, younger children might be included. In really poor situations, families might see this as a protective measure towards children.

The broad scope of independent child migration raises new research questions and analytical perspectives. A sizable type of migration/migrant is ignored if children are not recognised. To do this, it is necessary to break some traditional ideas around migration, because children's migration takes particular forms rooted in childhood, and hitherto often overlooked in migration-development debates, both statistically and conceptually. This invites questions about how migration interacts not only with gendered social relations, but also the lifestage; and this includes the role of notions of childhood, that vary across societies and over time with development.

The development implication of independent child migration is fundamentally about recognising how migration is affected by – and affects – the social relations around an individual, and what importance should be given in development policies and programmes to those changes. This challenges current migration-development debates to recognise intrahousehold diversity, and better understand development linkages to all family members. A balanced perspective on children's rights needs to be incorporated into strengthened thinking on rights-based migration. The paper has suggested six research lines into these issues, around conceptualising children's independent movements; the types of evidence needed and methods to obtain them; children in migrant labour processes; effects of seasonality; and selectivity of migration.

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