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UNICEF WORKING PAPER

Children "Left Behind"

KEY MESSAGES

Millions of children are “left behind” by one parent or both parents¹ migrating to find work, continue their studies, or seek a better life. The impact this has on a child’s development, economic status, opportunities, and well-being can range from detrimental to beneficial – and much can be influenced by the right policy decisions. However, policies concerning whether and how children are “left behind” – including migration management and labour migration policies – often ignore the impact on children. The link between child well-being, labour and migration policies needs to be clearly established to ensure children “left behind” can reach their full potential.

- Parents can establish a continuum of care to help their children achieve healthy psycho-social development despite their absence, through continued contact with their children and with support from their children’s in-country guardians and community.
- Case managers, teachers, healthcare providers, and caregivers can be trained to provide emotional and psychological support and ensure “left-behind” children receive supportive services.
- Remittances can fund access to healthcare and

education but are not a substitute for addressing the development challenges that encourage individuals to migrate.

- Governments can protect the right to family unity by providing regular channels for migration that allow families to travel together and developing temporary work programs that permit migrants to regularly return to their families or allow children to visit their migrating parents.
- More data and research on the challenges encountered by children left behind, could help inform better solutions that allow them to thrive.

KEY TERMS AND FIGURES: Who are Children ‘Left Behind’?

The phrase “children left behind” often refers to “children raised in their home countries or in their countries of habitual residence, who have been left behind by adult migrants responsible for them.” One or both parents may leave their children with family members, friends, the wider community, a child care institution, or on their own. Leaving children in a country of origin, for short or extended periods of time, is common – particularly in countries with seasonal migration due to agriculture.²

1. UNICEF recognizes that children are cared for and have close relationships with many individuals other than their biological or adoptive parents but refers to “parents” in this piece to reflect the present research and literature on Children Left Behind. The use of “parents” in this piece by no means excludes other caregivers who move and continue to care for children.
2. Sangeetha Madhavan, Nicholas W. Townsend, and Anita I. Garey, [‘Absent Breadwinners’: Father–Child Connections and Paternal Support in Rural South Africa](#), Journal of South African Studies, 2010.

There are no global estimates on the number of children “left behind” – the data are not necessarily collected and when they are, different methodologies may be used. Further, there is limited data available on undocumented and seasonal migration, and some families are hesitant to report a family member living abroad.³ The few national estimates that are available show that millions of children around the world are likely affected: in the Philippines, approximately 27 per cent of children (approximately 9 million) have at least one parent living abroad,⁴ while in Kyrgyzstan this percentage is at least 10 per cent (259,000 children).⁵ Children are also affected when their parents migrate internally, often to pursue work opportunities in cities.⁶ For example, in China, both parents of 22 per cent of the child population (or 61 million children) have migrated to urban areas.⁷

The Need for Data

The number of children separated from a parent due to migration, and the socio-economic costs for children whose parents have migrated, are currently unknown.⁸ In order to better understand the issues faced by children “left behind” and their communities, more data is needed on their health, and emotional and physical well-being.⁹ Research tools, like the UNICEF-supported Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) could usefully gather such data. Information management systems could also identify children who may be excluded from education or social services.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS: Why are Children Left Behind?

“But mom, all I need is you because I miss you so much. I miss my mom who kiss me at night before I sleep. I can’t express my feelings to you when you are calling me through cell phone ... I hope that someday we will be a happy family and I want to hug and kiss you this time. I miss you mom and I love you.”
-Sarah (16 years old child in the Philippines)¹⁰

UNICEF recognizes the phrase “children left behind” must be used with care, to avoid stigmatising children whose caregivers have migrated, demonising the caregivers for “leaving” to provide for their children, or create the impression that these children necessarily experience negative emotional or psychological impacts. For most parents, leaving in order to provide for their families is a difficult, but rational choice.

Limited job opportunities in communities of origin and the promise of remittances encourage parents to move for work.

Often parents live apart from their children because there are limited job opportunities in their community – or the available jobs do not pay enough to sustain a family. Higher-paying jobs elsewhere may allow parents to improve their family’s living situation. In 2017, the total volume of remittances, the funds sent by foreign nationals to their country of origin, surpassed 466 billion USD, with much of the money used to support the health, education and well-being of children left behind.¹¹ In some communities, remittances are also pooled to improve local water management, healthcare, and sanitation services. They also encourage saving and can increase domestic consumption.

3. Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Theodora Lam, [The Costs of \(Im\)Mobility: Children Left Behind And Children Who Migrate With a Parent](#), 2009, p. 3; UNICEF Romania, [National analysis of the phenomenon of children left home by their parents who migrate abroad for employment](#), 2008, p. 18
4. Yeoh and Lam, [The Costs of \(Im\)Mobility: Children Left Behind And Children Who Migrate With a Parent](#), p. 4
5. National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic and UNICEF Kyrgyzstan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014, Final Report. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic and UNICEF
6. Chenyue Zhao, et. al., [Separation and Reunification: Mental Health of Chinese Children Affected by Parental Migration](#), Pediatrics Sep 2018, 142 (3) e20180313
7. All-China Women’s Federation. National Survey of Rural Left-Behind Children and Migrant Children in China. Beijing, China: 2013.
8. IOM and Save the Children, [Social Costs of Children Left Behind](#), 2017, p. 3
9. Milena Nikolova and Carol Graham, Brookings, [Does Moving Across International Borders Boost Migrants’ Incomes, Happiness and Freedom Satisfaction?](#) (2014)
10. Rosemarie Edillon, [The Effects of Parent’s Migration on the Rights of Children Left Behind in the Philippines](#), UNICEF, 2008, p. 26
11. World Bank, [Record High Remittances to Low and Middle-Income Countries in 2017](#) (2017)

However, remittances do not always correlate with a reduction in poverty. In some cases, remittances can cause “small increases in extreme poverty” because the income lost due to the absence of a breadwinning migrant family member is not covered by the remittances sent home.¹² In some contexts, there is little to no evidence that remittances actually alleviate poverty for children.¹³

Remittances can also be unreliable: they can fluctuate depending on exchange rates, or family members may send less money home over time or stop sending it at all.¹⁴ Some parents begin a new life and family abroad, essentially abandoning their children in their country of origin. In some circumstances, when men migrate, this “abandonment” can have greater negative consequences for female-led households, as women tend to earn lower wages.¹⁵

A lack of safe and legal pathways prevents parents from migrating with their children.

Often parents are forced to choose between staying with their children or migrating to better provide for their children. In the context of labour migration, many work visas do not allow migrants to move with their families – and visitor visas for children can be difficult to obtain. Furthermore, parents may have limited time and capacity to care for their children in the destination country. Increasing restrictions on labour migration, especially for low-skilled workers, has contributed to a rise in irregular migration. When parents migrate irregularly, the journey may be too risky for children, and their irregular migration status may prevent children from accessing education and essential services. An irregular status also means parents cannot easily return home to visit, as they risk being detected – intended seasonal migration becomes long-term or permanent separation of families across borders.

The lack of safe and legal pathways for migrant workers and their families threatens children’s right to family unity, and

limits migrants’ capacities to integrate and prosper¹⁶ – while family unity has been shown to have a positive impact on worker productivity and provides essential support to children.¹⁷

Despite mentions of family unity, international and inter-regional frameworks, agreements, and conventions lack an affirmation of the right to family unity and concrete steps to ensure that “children left behind” can visit and travel with their families. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other sources of international law, children of migrant workers have the same right to live with their families as all other children, a right which should be applied indiscriminately.¹⁸ The right to family unity is available under some regional agreements, such as for individuals moving within the European Union (EU), or within Mercosur. Additionally, some existing international frameworks and conventions on migrant workers mention that family reunification may be facilitated by a State.¹⁹ For example, Article 44 of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families says that States “shall take appropriate measures to ensure the protection of the unity of the families of migrant workers.”²⁰ Only 54 States, however, are party to the Convention, and only 13 States have signed it.²¹ As such, frameworks exist to encourage family unity in the labour migration context, but there is a lack of concrete action and political will behind such agreements.



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12. UNICEF, [The Impact of International Migration: Children Left Behind in Selected Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean](#), 2007

13. Mohamed Azzedine Salah, UNICEF, [The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova](#), 2008, p. 27; UNICEF Romania, [National analysis of the phenomenon of children left home by their parents who migrate abroad for employment](#), 2008

14. Edillon, [The Effects of Parent’s Migration on the Rights of Children Left Behind in the Philippines](#) p. 45; UNICEF, [Children Left Behind in Selected Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

15. UNICEF, [Migration, Development, and Children Left Behind](#), 2010, p. 9.

16. UNICEF, [Family Unity Issue Brief](#), 2018

17. International Labour Organization Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Future ILO Activities in the Field of Migration, adopted in 1997; as already recognised by the International Labour Conference, 59th session, 1974, Report VII (I), Migrant Workers, 1973.

18. UNICEF, [Family Unity Issue Brief](#); [Convention of the Rights of the Child](#), Art. 9(1); [African Charter](#), Art. XIX (1); UDHR, [Vienna Declaration](#), Para. 21

19. See e.g. [International Labour Organisation, Convention concerning Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers](#), Entry into force: 09 Dec 1978, Art. 13

20. OHCHR, [International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families](#), adopted in 1990

21. OHCHR [Status of Ratification Dashboard](#), 2014

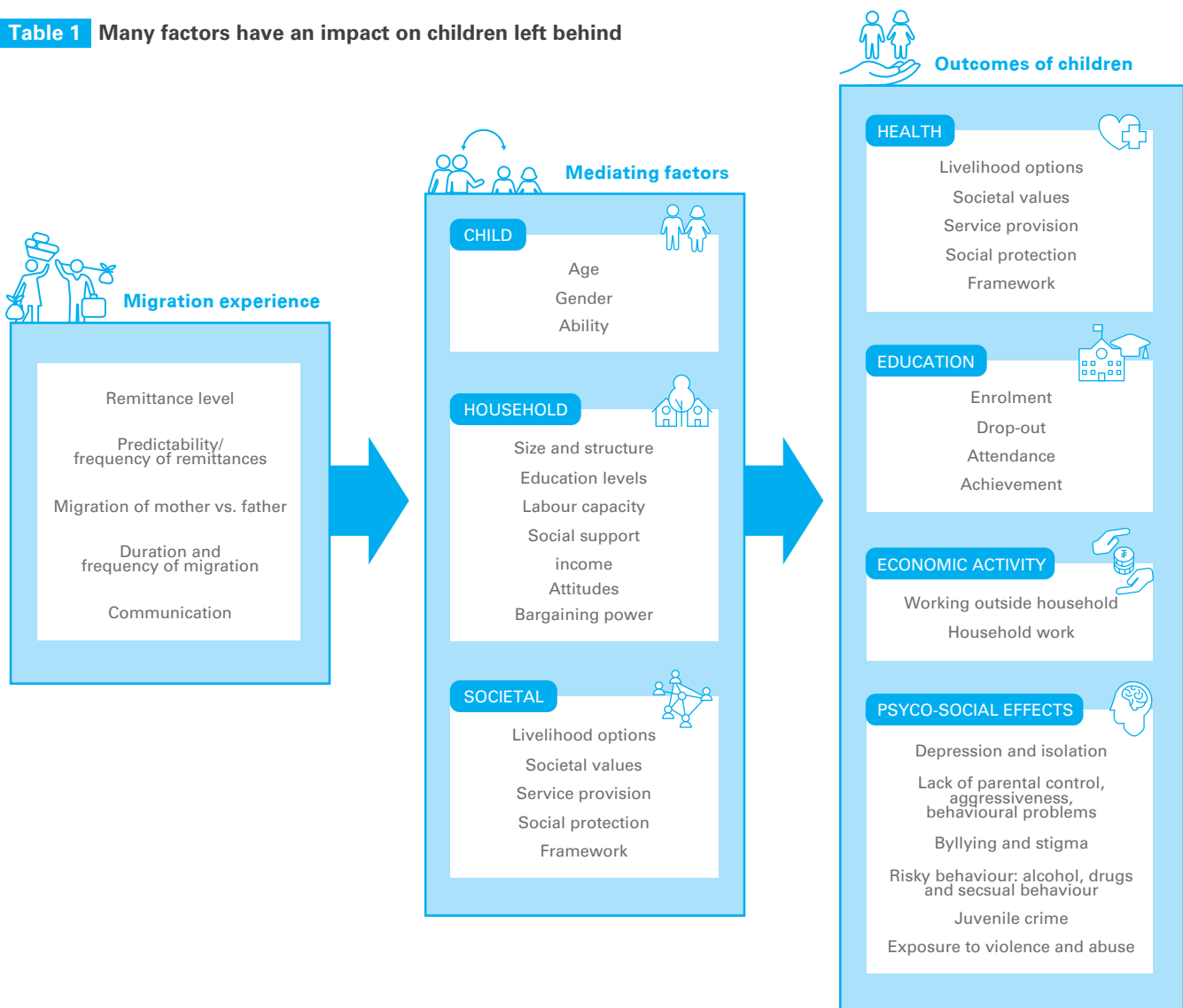
CONTEXT AND CONSIDERATIONS: Who is Responsible for Children “Left Behind”?

“Poverty and lack of jobs is the real problem here; migration is just a consequence.”
Hissor, Tajikistan (Mother of an infant whose husband had migrated)

Safeguarding the rights of children “left behind” means ensuring they are central to policy discussions on labour

migration and migration management. Children “left behind” are directly impacted by regulations limiting the movement of families. For example, labour migration policies may not provide migrants with options to visit their families or care for their children. On the other hand, constructive policies can provide options to leave and return, send remittances, and maintain contact with family members. The right policy choices can mitigate the risks and maximize the benefits of migration for children. A broad range of stakeholders, including parents, guardians, teachers, community members, social workers, policy makers, and the private sector, have a part to play in protecting the rights of children “left behind”.

Table 1 Many factors have an impact on children left behind



Source: UNICEF, [Consequences for the Protection and Well-Being of Children of Migrant Workers in Tajikistan](#) (2011)

EMOTIONAL HEALTH: Children “left behind” can achieve healthy psychological development when they have continuous contact with their parents and are supported by in-country guardians and community.

“I can now hand in the tuition fee on time,
I have more toys and pocket money,
Mum and Dad call back regularly,
But why am I always unhappy?”
-Poem written by a child of parents who
migrated, China²³

“When I see my friends are going for
their Eid prayer with their father and then
embracing each other, that’s when I miss my
father the most.”
-Teenage boy of a migrant father,
Bangladesh²⁴

Children may be left in the care of someone who can dedicate time and attention to child-rearing, without pressure to provide for the family financially. A well-equipped guardian may be as capable of caring for a child as the migrating parent. Yet parents plays an important role a child’s life, and communication between parents and their children can lessen the negative psychological impacts experienced by children “left behind.”²⁵ In some circumstances, children whose parents have migrated come to communicate more frequently with their parents.²⁶ Many children understand their parents have travelled abroad to give them a better future.²⁷ The age of the child

also plays a role – very young children may not experience the absence of a parent in the same way as an older child.²⁸ Communities should be inclusive of children whose parents have migrated. Many children “left behind” can experience social isolation – and this is exacerbated when they are unable to participate in community life.²⁹ In some communities, these children are perceived to be prone to “hooliganism” and “more arrogant, aggressive, and rude” than other children.³⁰ Children “left behind” can be stigmatized as “different” and even dangerous by parents in the community.³¹ Community acceptance of transnational migrant worker families and active inclusion and acceptance of children is key in reducing vulnerabilities and enabling resiliency among children “left behind”.

Many children are unable to communicate with their parents abroad. Long-term separation from parents can increase a child’s risk of psychological disorders, including depression and anxiety.³² Children “left behind” are more likely to experience psychological and emotional stress or loneliness, and may feel abandoned.³³ A parent beginning a new life and family abroad can cause further alienation and contribute to low self-esteem.³⁴ Feelings of abandonment, low self-esteem, and psychological and emotional stress can lead to maladjustment and behavioural problems.³⁵ These children may “act out” or become withdrawn.³⁶ This, in turn, can increase the risk of substance abuse and conflict with the law.³⁷

The psychological challenges faced by children “left behind” may depend on the gender of the child³⁸ or which parent migrates. Absence of a mother can cause a greater sense of abandonment and these children may struggle academically, psychologically, and emotionally.³⁹ Young children whose mothers have migrated can lose weight and their appetite, while children of all ages can experience

23. Jingzhong Ye, Chunyu Wang, Huifang Wu, Congzhi He, Juan Liu. (2013) [Internal migration and left-behind populations in China](#). Journal of Peasant Studies 40:6, pages 1119-1146

24. IOM and Save the Children, [Social Costs of Children Left Behind](#), p. 22

25. Yeoh and Lam, [The Costs of \(Im\)Mobility: Children Left Behind And Children Who Migrate With a Parent](#), p. 8

26. Ibid. p. 7

27. Salah, [The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova](#), p. 26

28. See e.g. UNICEF, [Consequences for the Protection and Well-Being of Children of Migrant Workers in Tajikistan](#) (2011), p. 108

29. Ibid., p. 10; Edillon, [The Effects of Parent’s Migration on the Rights of Children Left Behind in the Philippines](#), p. 40

30. Salah, [The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova](#), p. 14

31. Ibid. p. i

32. Cheng J, Sun YH. Depression and anxiety among left-behind children in China: A Systematic Review. Child Care Health Dev. 2015;41(4):515–523pmid:25495395

33. UNICEF, [Migration, Development, and Children Left Behind](#) (2010), p. viii; Salah, [The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova](#), p. 27; Valtolina GG, Colombo C.

[Psychological Well-Being, Family Relations, and Developmental Issues of Children Left Behind](#). Psychol Rep. 2012;111(3):905–928pmid:23402056

34. Yeoh and Lam, [The Costs of \(Im\)Mobility: Children Left Behind And Children Who Migrate With a Parent](#), p. 13

35. UNICEF, [Migration, Development, and Children Left Behind](#), 2010, p. viii; IOM, [Health of Families Left Behind](#), 2019

36. Salah, [The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova](#), p. 14

37. UNICEF, [The Impact of International Migration: Children Left Behind in Selected Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean](#), 2007, p. 10; Henry Gao, The Cost of Children Left Behind in China, Borgen Magazine, Dec. 11, 2016

38. Vanore, M. Mazzucato, V., and Siegel, M. (2015). Left behind’ but not left alone: Parental migration and the psychosocial health of children in Moldova. Social Science and Medicine, 132: 252-260

39. Yeoh and Lam, [The Costs of \(Im\)Mobility: Children Left Behind And Children Who Migrate With a Parent](#), p. 12; Salah, [The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova](#), p. 9-11

40. Yeoh and Lam, [The Costs of \(Im\)Mobility: Children Left Behind And Children Who Migrate With a Parent](#), p. 12

temper tantrums.⁴⁰ Adolescents with absent migrant fathers may experience higher levels of drug and alcohol abuse.⁴¹ However, the gender of the migrating parent does not necessarily make a significant difference to the child's adjustment.⁴²

When one or both parents migrate, family roles and division of labour can change. This can create opportunities to explore new roles, as well as psychological and social challenges for family members. Children may be left with grandparents who become stressed and experience health problems – and may themselves need to be cared for. Sometimes children must care for themselves and this can increase instability. Older children may become heads of household and take care of their younger siblings. Many children take on additional household responsibilities, so have less time to build relationships and play. As a result, these children may struggle at school, suffer from anxiety and depression, and live with high levels of stress.⁴³

Example from the Philippines

The Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) provides pre-departure training for migrants, and the Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration (OWWA), trains and educates children of migrant workers. The NGO Atikha works to make children and families left behind more self-reliant through training on economic opportunities. The goal of the programme is to improve young people's capabilities and understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Atikha created a school curriculum which focuses on sensitizing individuals to migration issues, including the sacrifices made by migrating parents, the importance of savings and education, and the value of maintaining family communication.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH: Children "left behind" can achieve healthy psychological development when they have continuous contact with their parents and are supported by in-country guardians and community.

“I have a hard time at school. I used to study well but since mother left, there was no one to help me check my assignments. My grades started to drop and I didn't have much interest in studies.”

-17-year-old male left behind in rural Moldova⁴⁴

Various factors impact a child's education when one or both parents migrate. Remittances and support from a parent abroad can help children afford school fees and supplies. Financial support may allow children to remain in school longer, as they avoid dropping out to work. Further, parents working abroad may gain a greater appreciation for schooling. For example, a study in India found that parents who migrated to urban areas became more appreciative of the value of education, and thus made sure their children received better schooling.⁴⁵ Teachers who understand the emotional challenges children "left behind" face can help them achieve greater success at school. Schools can even deliver programmes for families on caregiving and resilience.⁴⁶

Children with one parent who has migrated may be less likely to enrol in school, have declining attendance, or drop-out early. Older children in particular may face increased pressure in the home to care for younger children, and others may lack parental support to continue their education.⁴⁷ Notably, there is conflicting evidence on the impact of remittances on the education of children whose parents have migrated. In some countries, remittances can increase the chances of children staying in school, but they can also tempt children to leave school and migrate themselves.⁴⁸

41. UNICEF, [The Impact of International Migration: Children Left Behind in Selected Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (2007), p. 11

42. Valentina Mazzucato et. al., [International parental migration and the psychological well-being of children in Ghana, Nigeria, and Angola](#), 2015

43. Jamie Chamberlin, [Little Known Caregivers](#), American Psychological Association, Oct. 2010

44. Salah, [The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova](#), p. 16

45. Yeoh and Lam, [The Costs of \(Im\)Mobility: Children Left Behind And Children Who Migrate With a Parent](#), p. 12; Salah, [The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova](#), p., p. 14

46. Idb. 28 (citing Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC), 2004. Hearts Apart: Migration in the Eyes of Filipino Children (The Philippines, Scalabrini Migration Center)).

47. UNICEF, [Migration, Development, and Children Left Behind](#), 2010, p. ix; Salah, [The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova](#), p. 15-16; Ye Jingzhong (2011), [Left-behind children: the social price of China's economic boom](#), Journal of Peasant Studies, 38:3, 613-650, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2011.582946

48. Yeoh and Lam, [The Costs of \(Im\)Mobility: Children Left Behind And Children Who Migrate With a Parent](#), p. 12; Salah, [The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova](#), p. 15

Attitudes to gender may also impact the education of children left behind. For example, In India girls are less likely to receive an education if male family members migrate, as they must shoulder more of the domestic responsibilities.⁴⁹ The gender of the parent who migrates can also impact the education of their children, but there is no clear pattern. For example, the absence of fathers, when care is provided by mothers, corresponds to decreased school performance of children in Georgia, while in Moldova the opposite holds true.⁵⁰ The caretaker's level of education may also play a role – in Tajikistan, the presence of an educated mother generally means children are less likely to miss school.⁵¹

HEALTHCARE: Children “left behind” can access better health services when remittances are properly used and caregivers prioritize healthcare.

Remittances sent to children by migrant parents can fund healthcare, medicine, and nutritious food. In some countries, children of parents who have migrated are twice as likely to visit private healthcare facilities, and more likely to eat three meals a day than their peers.⁵² However, children “left behind” have less optimal height and weight measurements, compared with children whose parents have not migrated, when controlling for income.⁵³ Parental migration can negatively impact height and weight indices of children, particularly younger children, and many children of migrant workers have higher levels of nutritional neglect when compared to children of non-migrant workers.⁵⁴ Thus, the impact on the health of a child whose parents have migrated depends on the guardian and the country.

While children's access to healthcare when they are sick improves dramatically when their parents migrate, access to preventative healthcare does not necessarily change.⁵⁵ However, children whose parents have migrated tend to have higher rates of health insurance and their parents have higher rates of life insurance.⁵⁶ Healthcare may also hinge on a guardian's legal authorization and ability to seek treatment for the child. For example, if a guardian is not

legally authorized to administer or request certain types of care, they may face challenges in seeking medical assistance for a child. As such, it is essential to establish a legal continuum of care.

CHILD PROTECTION: Supportive guardians can provide essential care and protection to children “left behind”, but children should also be integrated into formal and effective child protection systems

“I wish my father was here, he would listen to me and would have protected me from this.”

-Child of parents who migrated, who was physically and emotionally abused, Bangladesh⁵⁷

The absence of a parent can impact a child's protection. Under the best circumstances, children will be left with supportive guardians who are well-equipped to care for them and supported by remittances from the parents abroad. A supportive community and informal care system can also help the child to feel emotionally and socially supported.

However, some children are exploited by their guardians or are at risk of physical, mental, or sexual abuse. The absence of parents can create tension between children and their guardians and result in the deterioration of the family structure. Some children may be placed in orphanages or residential care institutions, either as relations with their designated guardians break down, or because insufficient arrangements were made before their parents departed. Children may face greater risk of violence, exploitation, abuse, or neglect if they are separated from their families or placed in non-family care. Depending on the care

49. Yeoh and Lam, [The Costs of \(Im\)Mobility: Children Left Behind And Children Who Migrate With a Parent](#), p. 14

50. Victor Cebotari, Melissa Siegel, Valentina Mazzucato, [Migration and the education of children who stay behind in Moldova and Georgia](#), International Journal of Educational Development, vol. 51, 2016

51. UNICEF, [Consequences for the Protection and Well-Being of Children of Migrant Workers in Tajikistan](#), 2011

52. IOM and Save the Children, [Social Costs of Children Left Behind](#), p. x

53. Ibid.

54. IOM, [Health of Families Left Behind](#), 2019

55. Edillon, [The Effects of Parent's Migration on the Rights of Children Left Behind in the Philippines](#), p. 28

56. Ibid.

57. IOM and Save the Children, [Social Costs of Children Left Behind](#), p. 25

structure, some children of parents who have migrated, may be at greater risk of becoming victims of human trafficking, sexual violence, or child labour.⁵⁸ A lack of parental involvement can also increase the risk of early marriage.⁵⁹ In some cases, girls are pressured by their families to marry for protection, or to avoid being a social or economic burden for the family.⁶⁰ An additional protection risk stems from the possibility of the child being pressured for money by individuals in the community. The perceived wealth of the family or the actual remittances received can make the families of children with parents who have migrated prime targets for extortion.

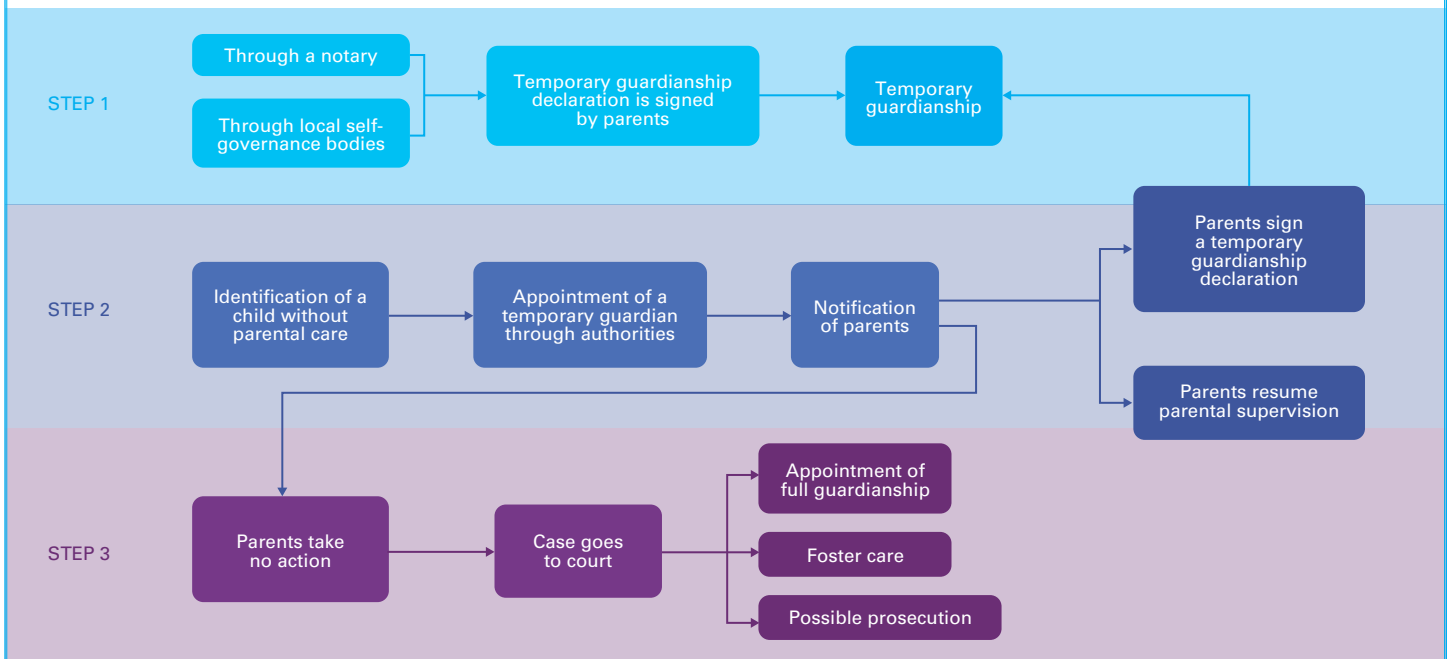
Children also face risks where there is no formal system for leaving legal guardianship rights. In many countries, the presence of a parent abroad is not registered or recorded due to their irregular migration status. Further, very few parents legally formalize a guardianship arrangement before leaving. This can create additional difficulties for children in accessing basic services, such as education or medical care. Moreover, a child may not be able to access social

benefits because they do not have a legal guardian to apply on their behalf. If a child comes into contact with law enforcement, they may not have a guardian who is legally authorized to advocate or make decisions on their behalf.

Addressing Gaps in Guardianship

With support from the European Union, UNICEF and the government of Kyrgyzstan have developed a three-step model to address and strengthen alternative care for children left behind by migrant parents, and to address gaps in guardianship arrangements in Kyrgyzstan. As described in the visualization below, parents leave a guardianship declaration to appoint a temporary legal representative for their child (step one). If children without parental care and proper guardianship are identified, they will be appointed a guardian (step two). Children who are not cared for will be assigned care through the court system (step three).⁶¹

Table 2 Need table title!



58. Salah, *The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova*, p. 27; UNICEF, *The Impact of International Migration: Children Left Behind in Selected Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2007, p. 14.

59. IOM and Save the Children, *Social Costs of Children Left Behind*, 2017, p. xi

60. Ibid.; IOM, *The Fragile Power of Migration: the needs and rights of women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who are affected by migration*, 2018, pp. 42-43.

61. UNICEF and European Union, *Reform proposal on alternative care for children affected by migration* (noting "the delegation has already prepared draft laws and by-laws for the implementation of the system described above, and also proposes to introduce the necessary amendments to other normative acts, including the Code of Civil Procedure, the Child Code, by-laws regulating the activities of local self-government bodies and the Family and Child Support Department and other relevant legislation.")

Example from Latvia

Latvia registers “surrogate” caregivers on the basis of notary proxy. The placement of a child into “proxy care” is subject to approval by courts based on an individual assessment that considers the best interests of the child. For children in Latvia, a social service provider promotes the well-being of the entire family through physical, emotional, and educational assistance. Latvia also provides social support groups and socio-cultural work with guardian and foster families.

SOCIAL PROTECTION: Children “left behind” must be included in social protection programmes, while taking into account their unique needs and vulnerabilities.

Children “left behind” are often excluded from social service programmes because they receive remittances and are seldom classified as living in poverty.⁶² Further, programmes that provide services may be under-staffed or lack resources – or they might prioritize children who are more economically vulnerable, but whose parents are present. Additionally, social protection and cash assistance programmes may not be tailored to the intermittent and unpredictable nature of remittances. For example, in Kosovo, social assistance programmes require families to declare monthly income received. If monthly income is high, it can mean children lose access to programmes for a period of time – and this makes families who receive sporadic remittances even more vulnerable. If a family fails to report their income, they can be disqualified from receiving benefits and ineligible for social assistance for six months to one year.⁶³



© UNICEF/UN05475/Gilbertson VII Photo

62. Yeoh and Lam, *The Costs of (Im)Mobility: Children Left Behind And Children Who Migrate With a Parent*, p. 24

63. UNICEF, *Technical Assistance Report - Enhancing Social Protection Cash Benefits*, May 2016, p. 24

RECOMMENDATIONS

Multiple factors impact the resilience of children “left behind”. These children, their parents and their temporary guardians need support, and services. Some children “left behind” are ‘better off’ than their peers with present parents, while others fare worse. Factors such as a supportive educational system, frequent contact with parents, a supportive community, access to services, and formal legal guardianship arrangements all increase the resilience of children “left behind”. Parents can provide the best care to their children if they can access services for themselves (such as healthcare and legal remedies), send remittances, maintain contact, and travel legally to visit their children. Parents, guardians, communities, teachers, policy makers and service providers play important roles to ensure the well-being of children “left behind”.

Recommendations include:

1. **Increase regular channels for migrant workers to move with their families, and allow family visits during temporary work programmes.** Encourage the private sector to think creatively about family-friendly work environments for all employees, including family visit time to allow workers to visit their family abroad.
2. **Provide pre-departure information** for parents and guardians on how to best support their children, highlighting potential emotional and psychological risks they might face and encouraging parents to maintain regular contact with their children (including through use of technology).
3. **Ensure educational, healthcare, child protection, and social protection providers are sensitive to the needs of children “left behind”** and have protocols in place to address child abuse, emotional issues, and other challenges these children might face. Train stakeholders on the challenges children “left behind” face, and empower communities to assist children and reduce stigma.
4. **Include children “left behind” as a vulnerability factor when assessing a child’s need for social services, and revise regulations to ensure these children are not excluded from services and assistance.** Ensure children “left behind” are not

excluded from cash assistance or food programmes on the assumption that remittances can provide adequate care and education.

5. **Ensure child protection systems provide adequate legal protections and assist parents to transfer legal guardianship to caregivers in the country of origin** so children can access services and legal aid. Where necessary, programmes should directly target children of migrant parents and their guardians with support. Programmes should ensure that vulnerable children, including children “left behind”, are identified and included in social assistance initiatives.
6. **Gather more data on children whose parents have migrated and migrating families in general** to better understand the challenges and opportunities they face. In particular, focus on the mental, emotional, and physical health of children left behind. Encourage countries to adopt information management systems to monitor both children who receive services and those who are not receiving services.