United Nations Children's Fund – UNICEF
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CHILDREN AND MIGRATION IN ECUADOR
Situation Diagnostic

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INTRODUCTION

While the peripheral countries get each time poorer and offer each time less opportunities for the working population, the central countries demand low cost labour with competitiveness, services, household activities, assistance to their elders purposes.

It has caused a growing migration, with its consequent impacts on the migrants' families, mainly the children and adolescents. Therefore, the relationship between children and migration has acquired great importance and demands improved knowledge and a deep reflection.

Chapter 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RECENT ECUADORIAN MIGRATION

1.1 Background for the migration boom

In Ecuador, during the nineties, the "debt crisis" resulted in the decrease of the social investment as well as the stagnation of the economy. We were also affected by the armed conflict with Peru, in 1995; the impacts of the crisis in Southeast Asia, in 1997; the El Niño weather pattern; the sudden drop of the oil prices, in 1998; the freezing of private funds in the banks, in 1999; the transfer of more than half of the private banks to the State, between 1999 and 2000; and the adoption of the American Dollar as our national currency, in 2000 that, even though at first glance resulted in some improvement, it has actually not brought about the reactivation of the productive apparatus neither the generation of work or labour opportunities.

Consequently, an accelerated increase of poverty and extreme poverty occurred together with social, regional, ethnical and gender inequalities deepening, factors that caused strong popular displeasure, lack of credibility of the country and a lack of future perspective.

1.2 Dimension of the Ecuadorian exodus

The above background caused a big migration to other countries. Between 1980 and 2006, 1,374,646 persons have left the country without return, one million of which left in the last decade. That figure represents 10% of the whole population of the country and is approximately 20% of its economically active population.

1.3 Causes for migration

Apart from the economic deterioration of the country, the decision on migration is also based by the following: family or friends networks; imaginaries on the destination countries (i.e.: "the American dream"); discrimination on gender, ethnics, sex; "calling" effect or the demand from the receiving countries; and technological and communications developments.

Ecuadorian migration is mainly for labour purposes; however, we should also take into account the permanent deterioration of the social protection policies and its consequences. From a gender point of view, the female migration also has other motivations such as: marriage, family, and "others" related with escaping from oppressive relations, leaving behind bad experiences with their mates (alcoholism, violence, infidelity) or looking for wider horizons.

Considering the above, we need to analyze the interrelation between the family, the children and migration in order to define intervention lines or develop the relevant policies.

Chapter 2: PROFILE OF THE MIGRANT POPULATION

2.1. Social-demographic profile of the migrant population

Gender
Female migration has been significant since the beginning of the nineties; in 1995, it equalled the male migration; and in 1999, it exceeded the male migration, and started a reverted trend due to fact that the number of migrant males is superior.

Age
Migration of young persons prevails. According to the 2001 Census, 57% of the migrants were between 18 and 30 years old. If the range widens to 40 years old, the percentage reaches 80.

Civil status
47.3% of the men and 43.6% of the migrant women were single at the time they left. Married men exceeded married women. Emancipated, divorced and widower migrant women doubled and even tripled the men in the same situation.

Ethnic group
Between 1996 and 2006, 5.7% of migrants were indigenous. This low figure might be due to cultural factors and to lower educational and economic opportunities for this group of people in the country.

Educational Level
The majority of migrants have a relatively high educational level compared to the national average. It represents a loss of human capital for Ecuador and the consequent benefit for the destination countries.

Origin
Most of the migrants are from the Highlands due to their strong domestic and foreign migration tradition; they have the information and the social and family networks that ease the mobilization of relatives and villagers. The Lowlands and the Amazon Region follow, having this last been rather a destination for pilgrims or workers of the oil industry. Nevertheless, the urban migrants prevail.

Destination countries
The previous flows almost exclusively went to the United States and, in a lower number, to Canada and Venezuela. Spain, the main destination of the Ecuadorian migrants, Italy, Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland and France, were included in the recent migration. Small amounts go to Venezuela, Colombia and Chile.

2.2. Social-economic condition of the migrants
Most of the migrants come from middle-low level households in the urban centres, being them the most affected by the crisis without being subject to any policy to cope

with the deterioration of their income and their life conditions. They can also obtain funds for international migration.

Chapter 3: MIGRATION, CHILDREN AND FAMILY

3.1. Impacts of migration on the families

3.1.1. Changes in the family structure
There are two main types of families in Ecuador: immediate and extended.

The extended family includes two or more generations, with consanguinity, affinity and symbolic kinship (i.e. godchild). It represents 46% of the total country wide, also being the most common for the migrants due to the support it can give to them, the lower impact it offers for children, and its propitious environment for the development of the "transnational family." 57% of the current heads of household are the parents of the migrant and 5.7% are his/her sons/daughters in law.

23.6% of the migrants have "complete immediate families"; while 24.3% have "incomplete immediate families." The percentage of households with a migrant father is 20.1% and almost triples the households with a migrant mother (7.6%).

Being the immediate family positioned first in the collective imaginary, the Ecuadorian society is prone to blame migration on family disintegration. In this respect, we suggest a wider, more dynamic and wholesome approach that opposes the idea of "family disintegration" to that of "family restructuring" as a result of migration. From this point of view, we can identify at least four organizational family modes:

a) The single-parent family, divided into those that have a common life project and those that sustain a conjugal break up.

b) The families only formed by siblings, being the eldest of them the head of household.

c) The extended family, that plays the role of "tutor family" for the remaining members. These families also sustain a restructuring process upon welcoming its new members; and,

d) The transnational families, which members here and abroad keep affective, economic, information links supported by the social and material progress of its members and which power relationships have not changed.

The impacts of these new family modes will depend of many factors: for example, who migrates, which is their support, in whose place they stay, term of the migration, communication and others.

When the father has migrated, the family is not quite affected since, from a cultural point of view, the mother has always been responsibility of the household. This situation gets worse when the father stops sending the remittances or they are not enough to cover the basic needs of the family. On the contrary, when the mother has migrated, the family is strongly affected and its vulnerability levels depend on whether

the father directly takes over the care of their children or he has the support from other women in his family. These impacts will be increased if the couple is breaking up prior to or together with the migration.

If both the father and the mother have migrated, the original family structure (in the case of immediate families) is significantly altered as it implies a restructuring with the elder brother/sister as its head of household, or the attachment of the children to other families, preferably to their maternal grandparent's.

The success of these families depends on the creation of strong affective and communication links between those who leave and those who stay. Added to it are the regular remittances to support and keep the family together.

In summary, migration indeed reorganizes the families, but it is not the only cause for their disintegration. It is material to have this aspect in mind in order to avoid and/or reproduce stigmatizing discourses on migration, the migrants' families, and the children and adolescents of the migrants.

3.1.2. Modification of roles and responsibilities within the family dynamics
By taking over the full responsibility, authority and orientation of the family, women women get stressed due to the uncertainty of the remittances (many people are irregular migrants, therefore they have limited labour opportunities), the dependence on them, and the fear in the sense that her spouse would not send money any more. These are very frequent situations, especially if migration was an individual decision or the stay in the destination country has been extended for many years.

Men that are in charge of the family have to partially take over the domestic work and responsibilities which are deemed by the society, the family and the individuals as proper to women. This change also affects his affective, time, leisure activities, among many others.

The impact for the grandparents in the tutor families is even greater because they have to grow and educate their grandchildren, even though they have already played that role with their own children, changing around their plans and the life stage they ought to live. The reasons for their stress include the following: even though they are in charge of their grandchildren, they must subject to their own migrant children as these are the decision makers on education, goods, permits, etc.; they are constantly worried about the fact that the remittances may not be enough to thoroughly grow their grandchildren, as well as fearful of having to completely take over the support to the grandchildren if their migrant children stop sending money.

Despite the changes in the daily practices of the families, no structural changes have occurred regarding the gender stereotypes and power relationships inside the families.

This work overload for the female heads of households and tutors has affected their rights, therefore it has been particularly addressed, together with the risks for those who migrate, by several international documents where strategic objectives have been designed in order to guarantee protection for these women. An example of it is the action platform approved in Beijing in 1995, within the framework of the IV World Conference on Women.

3.1.3. Arising of a migration culture

As previously stated, the families act as networks and support the progress of its members. Besides, they are information and contact sources for resource administration and control, and they promote and enhance the migration of other relatives, this way generating a "call effect" that would consolidate a migration culture. The longer the term the first migrant of the family has been abroad, the bigger the number of migrants in the family.

3.1.4. Benefits for the family

Remittances allow a relative family welfare by overcoming poverty, even though it does not mean that those families would save enough capital to widen their capabilities and stop being poor. These remittances are only a complement to the family income but not the economic support for the group[1].

Some tutor women are being paid small amounts for caring for the children and adolescents that have stayed. This fact has a very important symbolic value since it would be the first time that a woman is paid for doing domestic work in her own house.

3.1.5. Impacts of the migration process on the person

Grandparents are afraid of the generation gap they have with their grandchildren, being difficult for them to understand the children's behaviour and attitudes. Their duties are easier when the children are younger. These feelings oppose to the joy and satisfaction of having their grandchildren around, receiving their love and energy to carry on.

The greatest concern of women and men whose spouses have migrated is to fully and lonely grow their children. Family reunification is uncertain, being considered as an important thing for the children but, at the same time, a risky adventure. Opposed to this concern is the feeling of being closer to their children, watching them grow thanks to the emotional, affective and economic support.

The sensation of vulnerability of and affectation to identities is on the other hand. Thus, the women's greatest concern in this sense goes between growing their children in absence of their father, the social pressure and control, and the personal, familiar and social need to prove that they are "good mothers and wives". In turn, men's big concern is the effects on their "supplier identity" due to the fact that their migrant wives are economically supporting the household.

3.2 Impacts on the migrant's children

3.2.1. Situation of the children and adolescents that remain in origin, in figures

In 2000, 150,000 children had one or both parents abroad, that is eight times the number in 1990 (17,000). Each migrant left behind an average of 2 children, and the total amount of children under 18 that remained in Ecuador is 218,.704.

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[1] 61% of the families that receive remittances in Ecuador use then for consumer goods and services – food, house rent, utilities, telephone, transportation, clothing and medicines-. 22% invest them – purchase of estate (4%), education (2%), savings (8%) and businesses (8%)-. 17% uses them for luxurious purposes.

In the case of the impact on country families, their affective links and relationships weakens, consequently endangering the transnational family project due to the difficulty in keeping a frequent communication with the migrant because of the distances they have with the populated centres or the technological and infrastructure limitations that affect those places.

The destination country is one of the factors for leaving the children or migrating with them. Thus, migrants to the U.S.A. leave their children in a bigger proportion than those to Europe due to the involved costs and risks[2].

On the other hand, 23.4% of migrant men and 26.2% de migrant women that left behind children under 18, are not sending remittances.

3.2.2. Impacts of migration on the migrant's children and adolescents
In order fully understand this issue, we need to listen to different voices, particularly those of the children.

✓ *Affective – emotional impacts*
The bigger impacts are sustained at the beginning of the migration of the parents, resulting in depression, feeling of abandonment, incomprehension due to the additional fact that they were not informed on the migration and were not involved in the process.

Nevertheless, if migration occurs in a non-conflictive family context, the children report confidence levels despite of the distance, and because communication is being maintained, the affective links are being renewed, etc., which generates confidence on a common family project.

This confidence is affected when the parent gets each time more distant or does not send money. It gets worse when, in addition to the changes the children have to sustain within the family, they also have to move to another neighbourhood, school, leave their friends, as it affects their daily customs and could generate more instability; when the partial family reunification occurs; and, when the idea on return is getting diluted (very strong in the first years), all of which generates disillusion, feeling of abandonment and resentment to the parents.

✓ *Social stigmatization*
A social stigma has been created around these children: they are seen / qualified / victimized / discriminated and excluded by different sectors (school, mass communication media, state, society in general) as troublesome, conflictive, uncontrolled children and are immediately associated to negative things such as alcoholism, drugs, early pregnancy, gangs, among others). This affects their rights, particularly their right to live a life without violence.

Such social stigmas are opposed to the self-perception they have, arguing that the migration of their parents have helped them to mature.

✓ *Self-control and maturity as something important for them*

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[2] Most of migrants to the U.S.A. travel by sea and land, crossing several borders and facing adversities and hazards for a period of 30 to 50 days. The newspapers are permanently informing about migrants that die in the travel, that are abandoned, that are detained and deported, women that are sexually abused, etc.

These are two positive aspects of migration, according to the migrants' children.

✓ *Economic stability and education and health benefits*
Another positive aspect according to the migrants' children is the economic and social benefits of migration of their parents, which guarantee the compliance with some of their basic rights such as education, health, etc., bringing more tranquillity to their lives.

Remittances have made possible for many migrants' children to regularly attend to school and, in some cases, even to better schools; at the same time, for poorer families, remittances have resulted in giving the children the time for attending to school. While they imply benefits (better education, social mobility, prestige), these changes also generate some stress and emotions due to the new environment, friends, etc.

On the other hand, the school performance in the first days of migration tends to decrease, but it gets normal and even better some time later because these children make a bigger effort in order to compensate the sacrifice their parents are doing for them.

Another negative impact is the increase in school desertion, which could be due to the fact that some adolescents have to quit school in order to take care of their siblings. However, the biggest difficulty is the monitoring of homework, particularly when the mother has migrated.

This economic stability and its collateral benefits are affected when the migrants' children stop receiving the remittances, even more considering the weakness of some public institutions devoted to children care and the lack (or ignorance) of legal resources to demand for support rights of the children before the international courts.

✓ *Forced and premature take over of maternal or paternal responsibilities*
When the mother has migrated, most of the responsibilities of the household lies on the elder daughters, who are delegated for that purpose as "something natural", turning them into sister-mother of the younger children. It happens in the single-parent families as well as in the families only formed by siblings. If the father is the migrant, the elder daughters support the mother in the domestic work and, in the poorer households, they even take over some economic responsibilities, especially if their father is not sending the remittances. This last new role is also played by the sons. This role and the new way to relate with their siblings-children generate ambiguous feelings in them and at the same time directly affect their own life projects and in many times frustrate them.

✓ *Incidence on the construction of their identities and life projects*
Migration is important for the construction of male identities and serves as a socially recognized stand point in the transition from childhood to adultness (among the males) within the communities of the highlands.

Through the experience of their parents, the migrants' children acquire new values, dreams, fears, that will mould their vision of the world, their future projection as a person and their expectations. Therefore, migration becomes an element in the not very far life horizon of many of these adolescents, whether it is for family reunification purposes or for education, new experiences or retribution to their parents (what some authors call "generational change over") because, in many cases, the adolescents are faced with the "social mandate" of becoming, when the time comes, labour migrants.

These life projects are built in the middle of crossed situations and feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity.

More vulnerability to abuse and violence
Finally, many of these children and adolescents are subject to physical and sexual hazards. On this regard, the Special Rapporteur of the U.N. Human Rights Commission, on her report on her visit to Ecuador, states "…the girls are exposed to physical, psychological and sexual maltreatment by their relatives or neighbours in charge of them" (Resolution 2001/52. 2002).

The women, children and adolescents that travel abroad through organized networks (coyotes) or "travel agencies" and "local creditors networks" are also in danger.

3.3. Impacts of family reunification
In the short term, few migrants make true their dream to reunite their families, whether returning to the country or "bringing" their relatives to the new destination. However, as time goes by, children and adolescents have been slowly integrated to the migration process.

It might be explained by the following: high amount of migrant women that look for, more than men, the reunification of their families; Spanish migration policy that has allowed that half of the Ecuadorians living there regularize their stay; and, language and cultural affinities that enhance the integration of the migrants and their children. On the other hand, this trend to reunite the family in the destination country reflects the decision of many migrants on not returning to the country in the short term.

Family reunification is one of the main expectations of the migrants' children and of the involved persons that, however, are filled with uncertainty, ambivalence and ambiguities between "leaving" or "staying". Something to take into account in this regard is the legal limitations and the irregular situation of many migrants.

It is worth to mention that as family is a dynamic entity, its reunification involves reconstruction and renegotiation, interconnection of new elements, without forgetting old and new conflicts and power relationships under traditional gender systems.

For example, reunification at destination may bring about inconveniences on adaptation to the new social, cultural environment, or difficulties on school, discrimination, stigmatization, deprivation of their basic rights, among many others.

On the other hand, reunification at origin also includes difficulties: those who return not always readapt to the environment and customs of the country; the initial reencounter produces a lot of joy, but then some stress arises between parents and children, between the parents, and not necessarily because there is no love, but because of the long absences that bring about mixed feelings, unavoidable distances, untold expectancies, guilt, etc.

The present overview demands an immediate and common action from all the society, as many state institutions and provincial authorities have not yet internalized the issue. Consequently state actions, as well as those of the society as a whole, must be supported and strengthened in such area.

Chapter 4: GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

These lines do not cover every aspect for debate and all the required interventions; they are rather general proposals (strategic lines) aimed at contributing for a reflection oriented towards the definition of institutional and public policies nation wide, and the common minimum country agenda on the issue. Starting from these considerations, the priorities would be:

✓ *Research*
Academic and public entities should be committed towards increasing the knowledge on migration and its impacts, which will serve as the basis for the development of the relevant policies with children, gender and rights approaches. The migrants' children and adolescents, as well as the non-migrants' should be seen as important stakeholders of migration; their perception and the way they live migration, particularly regarding the compliance with their rights should be known.

✓ *Promotion and awareness*
Mass (radio, newspapers, TV) promotion and information campaigns should objectively guide the public, giving priority to the local government, public servants, educational and health authorities, communicators, teachers, on migration and its social, cultural and economic effects on the persons, their families and their communities, with the objective of stopping stigmatization of the migrants and their families and its relevant consequences.

✓ *Definition of coordinated migration policy according to the current reality*
A priority in the country is the definition of a coordinated policy to address the current migration situation with a rights approach, meaning general rights and specific rights of children and adolescents. Additionally, plans, programmes and actions should be developed to take care of specific gender, age, culture, and other demands; to strengthen the benefits of migration; and, to minimize its general negative effects and those on children and adolescents in particular; as well as to guarantee the protection of the rights of every involved person, especially of the women and children and adolescents considering that they face more risks, discrimination an exclusion.

The migration policies must the part of country and local plans, reason why the sectional governments should be involved in these processes.

✓ *Political incidence and citizen watch*
Promote the contact between and coordinated work of the different entities that work for the advocacy of the rights of the migrants and children and adolescents in the country as well as in their destination, in order to make available for them information flows, support and strategic alliances to promote collective actions and make more social and political pressure on the issue.

In parallel, being a right of the citizens, we see the need of a citizen watch as it is a suitable mechanism to have the community informed and active regarding proposals for and assessment of governmental and institutional actions regarding migration and rights advocacy. This watch would be created in the short term and with gender and children and adolescents rights approach.

✓ *Support to economic investment*

Remittances are an important income source for the national economy as well as for the families. The support for the design and implementation of remittance investment projects for the families and communities will reduce the vulnerability levels of those who depend on this income. These projects should have as their priority the women heads of household as well as the families only formed by siblings or those headed by old age grandparents. Among these projects would be the creation of community banks, special credit lines or scholarships, as well as technical-productive and financial assistance.

✓ *Support to the voluntary return – reinsertion in the origin country*
A programme should be designed for voluntary return to the family as well as to the social and labour environment, including technical, economic and business training, as well as more socially oriented actions such as specialized psychological support for the different stakeholders (the returning person, his/her children, spouse, close family). This return programme should be an alternative for the migrant at any time. Additionally, the reinsertion programmes should pay special attention to the forced return subject (exclusion, deportation). More concrete actions in this sense would be job support and permanent accompaniment to the migrants' tutor family, children and spouse that are in the country, as well as for the migrant that is planning to return; schedule and support to periodic visits to regular migrants; pressure for reaching binational agreements in the previous sense in cases of irregular migration. These actions could also be addressed to those families that do not have return plans, considering that family reunification at destination is one of the biggest expectations of the migrant population and their families.

✓ *Foster an enriching relationship between children and adolescents with migrant and non-migrant parents*

Destigmatization and promotion of an enriching relationship, based on respect, are important challenges in order to protect the migrants' children from such symbolic violence. Therefore, these children should be trained on their rights and the other children of non-migrants should learn about the positive aspects of migration and respect to others.

To achieve this, the educational institutions should incorporate migration within its organizational culture. Concrete actions: foster knowledge, reject stigmatizing discourses and practices, open reflection spaces and debate between teachers and students, organize interschool forums, offer support to migrants' children as well as their immediate relatives; create programme on assisted homework, leisure time, programmes and activities aimed at generating a harmonic and inclosing relationship that guarantees a respectful and welcoming environment.

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