



EPP Public Group Hearing on

Girls in Migration: Collateral victims or actors of a world in motion?

21 September 2011, European Parliament

ASP 3E2

14:30- 18:00

EPF Background paper

- Building evidence for inclusive policies –

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Overall, the migration of girls and young women is poorly understood and rarely covered in the academic literature. Yet given the over-representation of adolescent girls in capital cities throughout sub-Saharan Africa, girls' migration appears to be a large-scale phenomenon. There also appears to be little information on migration-related exploitative labour and even less on girls migration as a process in many regions around the world. Whilst there has been much research on migrant children and adolescents in urban areas, smaller towns, labour hotspots, transport corridors and many international border areas have yet to be researched. This is crucial to identify the routes and networks girls use to move, to explore the reasons why girls migrate, the means at their disposal to sustain themselves as well as to identify the vulnerabilities they are exposed to while on the move and at their place of arrival.

Millions of girls move within and across borders without us knowing much about what they do in this new place of residence or how this mobility can create risk for these girls. Apart from being often denied the right to quality education and decent employment conditions, migrant girls are often exploited, and find themselves in tragic situations. Rural to urban migrant girls —many of whom migrate to escape poverty or forced and early marriage and to seek out educational and employment opportunities in the new place of residence—face particular barriers to the education system and the labour market, much of which are attributable to cultural attitudes that do not prioritize girls' needs. They may find work in domestic settings and in small businesses where the possibility of exploitation is enormous, but realizing their full potential remains a rare occurrence for migrant adolescent girls.

Very commonly, migrant girls are exploited because they are young, living apart from parents and protective social networks, easily manipulated, unaware of their rights, disconnected from services, and afraid to expose their negligent employers. In the worst of situations, they work sixteen or more hours a day, are beaten, badly fed, poorly paid, and engage in transactional sex to pay for their basic needs. Such transactional sex puts them at further risk of acquiring and transmitting HIV.

Half of the world's people are under 25 and one in ten people alive today are girls aged 10 to 19. About 85 per cent of them (500 million) live in developing countries for which they represent a potentially enormous social and economic resource. Investments in girls' development, including education, livelihoods, financial literacy, and health, are amongst the most cost-effective expenditures in terms of the societal and economic returns, such as to combat to poor-health effect of single motherhood (In Kenya, according to 2003 Demographic and Health Survey, 50% of mothers had experienced single motherhood by age 30).

Yet adolescents are often neglected from countries' development agenda, and when policies and programs are developed in favour of them, the poorest girls in the poorest communities are effectively excluded by current youth, gender, violence prevention, and reproductive health initiatives. As the world's poorest continent, Africa is home to some of the most disadvantaged and marginalized girls in the world, and we are seeing an increasing and concerning trend of girls and young people migrating as a survival strategy.

The purpose of this public hearing is to identify the main drivers of adolescent migration, how it is organised and how it impacts on the lives of girls. The objective is to gather knowledge on how to adjust policy and funding in order to improve the social conditions and living standards of girls worldwide. Girls' lives at the individual and collective levels are at stake, and a number of questions need to be addressed including:

- 1) **How many migrant girls live worldwide, in the EU and in the developing world?**
- 2) **What needs to be done for migrant girls as they move at times of critical change?**
- 3) **How does young female migration affect sending and receiving societies, populations and communities (with regards to population structure, marriage market, socioeconomic organisation)?**
- 4) **What actions could or should be taken? How to address the vulnerability of adolescent migrant girls within the framework of European Union migration policies?**
- 5) **How to take adequately into account the viewpoint of migrant girls?**

Getting the picture right^{1,2}:

Countless migrant girls aged 10-19 are on the move

→ **More than 10 million** girls aged 10-19 live outside their countries of origin as international migrants. 2.6 million of them live in Europe (including 1.7 million in the European Union among which at least 200 000 in France) while 5 million of them live in developing countries.

→ **At least 10 million** girls and young women are either refugees, internally displaced, stateless or asylum seekers and live in camps around the world.

→ Data on international migration have many limitations, particularly for adolescent girls.

→ Even more limited (though arguably more common) are data on adolescent girls' internal migration

→ Without clear data, it is hard to know the scope of the problem we are attempting and the context of adolescent girls' migration (before departure, on the move, and at the place of arrival)

Girls' vulnerability to migration unveiled - the case of migrant girls in Ethiopia

Studies of urban rural migration often find the most likely migrants are adolescents and young people. Yet few studies have explored patterns of adolescent girls' migration and the role of migration in transitions to adulthood. This study uses data from a population-based survey of over 1,000 adolescents aged 10-19 in slum areas of Addis Ababa. Many girls have migrated into the city for educational and work opportunities. Nearly one-quarter of migrant girls moved to escape early marriage in their rural homes. In this study migrants were found more vulnerable than natives in terms of lacking of parental presence, schooling, and social connectedness. Such young people, most of whom are girls, are "falling through the cracks" of policy and programs and in need of increased program attention. (In "Migration and vulnerability among adolescents in slum areas of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia" by Erulkar Annabel S.; Mekbib Tekle-Ab; Simie Negussie; Gulema Tsehai, Journal of Youth Studies 9(3): 361-374 Publication date: 2006)

¹ United Nations Population Division, World Migrant Stock (2010) <http://esa.un.org/MigAge>

² Women Refugee Commission 2011, [Refugee Girls: The Invisible Faces of War](#)

A. Policy priorities in countries of origin & transit, & internal migration hotspots.

****** FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF DEVE & AFET COMMITTEES MEMBERS AND ACTIVITIES ******

- 1) Getting young girls (and boys) to school on-time, keeping them there through the critical period of adolescence, increasing the proportion of girls in-school at grade-for-age, and minimizing dropout, especially around the time of puberty must be priorities.
- 2) Advocate for laws to address gender inequalities and protect adolescents from harmful practices, and any form of exploitation and/or discrimination.
- 3) Empower young people with education, personal identification documents, financial literacy, savings accounts, and livelihood skills and resources that help them build their self-esteem and allow them to make a decent living. Adolescent girls also need negotiation skills to help them delay sexual initiation, reject unwanted advances and avoid sexually transmitted infections.
- 4) Educate families, communities and authorities about the value of girls' education and the risks of child marriage to family health and opportunities.
- 5) Protect the health of pregnant and married adolescent girls (including support for safe delivery, infant feeding and postnatal care but also education, counselling, contraceptive services and post-abortion care) since young first-time mothers are at the greatest risk of maternal mortality.
- 6) Build protective social networks (such as safe spaces for young girls) under the guidance of trusted female leaders as these networks can be powerful and cost-effective in reducing risk and imparting knowledge needed to develop positive aspirations, values and attitudes.
- 7) Disaggregate development and migration data by age and sex to better inform groups in greatest need and map need against coverage in order to develop more effective strategies and approaches.
- 8) Involve young people before they go "off-track", especially the most vulnerable such as 10-14 years-old girls who no longer qualify for many programmes aimed at children, in programming decisions and policies aimed at building life skills, as their contributions will make programmes more successful.
- 9) Develop a package of services that are friendly to young migrant girls and especially to the most vulnerable ones (including street children, sex workers, refugees and victims of violence).
- 10) Develop migrant adolescent girls' health, social, and economic assets so they have the power to make informed choices about sex, reproduction but also education and employment.
- 11) Address sexual and reproductive health risks faced by adolescents in conflict, post-conflict and migration settings. Humanitarian and development assistance interventions should support drop-in centres and other supportive facilities where young migrant girls and refugees can freely access health information and services from responsive female health providers.
- 12) Girls migrating without parents or guardians should be particularly protected. The involvement of communities, media, schools' authorities, religious leaders and employers is therefore critical.

B. In Europe: Calling for a genuine agenda for girls' integration

**** FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF LIBE COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND ACTIVITIES ****

- 1) The integration of migrant girls requires close cooperation between the national governments, who remain responsible for defining their integration policies, and local or regional authorities and non-state actors, who are implementing integration measures on the ground. To this purpose, the Commission is developing a European toolbox for knowledge exchange with common indicators to monitor results of integration policies. How will migrant girls feature in this new initiative? How will the Commission make sure that they obtain their fair share of attention and interventions?
- 2) The Europe 2020 Strategy and the Stockholm Programme fully recognise the potential of migration in building a competitive and sustainable economy and they set out, as a clear political objective, the effective integration of legal migrants, underpinned by the respect and promotion of human rights. Ensuring better living conditions for migrants also appears essential to realize the full potential of migration. According to the Commission "social inclusion measures should aim to remove possible barriers blocking effective access to social and health services, and fight against poverty and exclusion of the most vulnerable" (COM (2010) 758).
- 3) The integration of migrant girls requires particular attention to their specific needs. This particularly for beneficiaries of international protection as they often went through traumatic experiences which require specific social and psychological support. Policies should be designed to maximise social capital, minimise isolation and restrictions to their rights, ensure access to quality education and training while provide for fair access to services such as effective language learning, accommodation, health care.
- 4) As the Commission acknowledges it (COM(2011 455)), this notably requires:
 - a) By the Member States: 1) A better use and higher degree of existing EU financial instruments (the European Fund for the Integration of Third-country nationals; the European Refugee Fund, the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund) which should better support migrants' (*and among them migrant girls'*) participation and successful integration at local level. 2) Measures to implement in practice the principle of equal treatment and to prevent institutional as well as every-day discrimination and;
 - b) By the commission: 3) the full and correct implementation of existing directives on non-discrimination and in the area of legal migration.
- 5) Commissioner Malmström recently stated, "to date, integration of migrants in European has not been very successful." Too little is being done for the sake of girls coming here. Determined and consistent action is urgent on this issue, also since well-integrated migrant girls would be a tremendous asset for the EU as they would enrich our societies and countries of origins both culturally and eventually economically.
- 6) The Commission plays an important role in bringing together relevant actors in dialogue on the main integration challenges. As a follow-up activity to this event, the Commission should further involve members of European and National parliaments but also migrant girls themselves in its consultative processes, especially when it relates to joint Migration and Development initiatives.

C. Standing up for the rights of migrant girls - the case of unaccompanied girls

**** FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF FEMM COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND ACTIVITIES ****

- 1) One might have thought that in the European Union, where child mortality is close to zero, education and healthcare a given, and social services and institutions well developed, girls' rights would be one of the most uncontroversial topics for policy-makers. Not, it seems, when the girls in question are unaccompanied migrants. All too often the thousands of unaccompanied girls arriving without parents or caregivers find themselves trapped in their status as migrants, with European governments giving little consideration to their vulnerabilities and needs as children, nor to the difficulties they might face in accessing services due to linguistic, cultural and other barriers. Many end up without the humane treatment Europe claims to stand for. Instead they may face prolonged detention, intimidation and abusive police behavior, registration and treatment as adults after unreliable age exams, bureaucratic obstacles to accessing education, abuse when detained or housed in institutions and, too often, exploitation. Compounding this, many suffer from a pervasive lack of legal defence that leaves them unable to claim their rights.
- 2) Unaccompanied migrant girls represent a tiny fraction of all migrants entering Europe, and governments are unable to present reliable data. Yet, officials across the continent speak about a "mass influx" or "avalanche" of migrant children. Unsurprisingly, these children have now become the focus of regional concern, not least because they are perceived to be a resource burden.
- 3) It is positive that the EU wants to address the situation of these girls and boys in the Stockholm Program, its five-year asylum and migration strategy, starting with a 2010 action plan. EU policy coherence and action is needed in light of legal provisions that require governments to remove a trafficking victim under one set of laws, and to protect the victim under another set. Additionally, EU legislation does not address the needs of those children who never file an asylum application- possibly a majority-including the needs of those who cannot file a claim because of practical or legal obstacles. Finally girls who are asylum seekers only represent a minority of migrants girls and therefore policies and programmes should first of all be developed in order to reach all migrant adolescent girls and not just some categories of them.
- 4) The EU should nevertheless make sure that its policies take into account the complexities behind girls' migration and informs itself on the basis of existing and, where necessary, additional unbiased research. It should first of all prevent girls from falling victims of unintentional policy or regulatory impact. Such considerations are essential to achieve & ensure better protection standards for migrant girls everywhere.
- 5) The EU also needs to make sure that its policies do not undermine but realize European governments' obligations under international human rights law and under the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights. Its proposed children's rights strategy has the potential to contribute toward this aim and should make unaccompanied migrant girls an integral part. Ultimately, though, the EU should also consider filling the existing gaps with a set of binding rules that harmonize member states' response to the common needs and vulnerabilities of all unaccompanied migrant girls in Europe, whether they escape persecution or abuse, are smuggled into Europe for exploitation, or have left their homes in search for a better life.
- 6) Last but not least, the EU needs to underscore that its members must fulfill obligations under applicable human rights treaties while these girls are on European territory, and that girls are protected from return to abuse, ill-treatment, or neglect. Member states whose actions fall below European standards should be held to account. Without such decisive actions, unaccompanied migrant girls are likely to remain trapped in their status as migrants, with the result that their protection and safety as children remain elusive aspirations.

D. Opportunities for integrating girls in Migration and Development policies

*** NON- EXHAUSTIVE LIST ***

- 1) In the article 11 of its protocol on gender and development the Southern African Development Community (SADC) states that States Parties shall adopt laws, policies and programmes to ensure the development and protection of the girl child by: (a) eliminating all forms of discrimination against the girl child in the family, community, institutions and at state levels; (b) ensuring that girls have equal access to education and health care, and are not subjected to any treatment which causes them to develop a negative self-image; (c) ensuring that girls enjoy the same rights as boys and are protected from harmful cultural attitudes and practices in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; (d) protecting girls from economic exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence including sexual abuse; and (e) ensuring that girl children have equal access to information, education, services and facilities on sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- 2) It is positive that the European Council such as in its March 2011 conclusions welcomes the Commission's promotion of a comprehensive and migrant-centred approach to migration between the countries of the Southern Neighbourhood region and the European Union. Likewise, the 2010 European Action Plan for Gender Equality and Empowerment in Development Cooperation is an laudable operational document that concentrates on further placing gender at the centre of the EU's development policy, involving more coordination with the European Union's 27 member states. While girls are mentioned on several occasions, it is not clear how their specific vulnerabilities are integrated into this initiative. The related toolkit on mainstreaming gender equality illustrates how educated girls are better off than non-educated ones and recalls the need for accessing rights and empowerment. Overall, the gender action plan does however not distinguish specific vulnerabilities for girls which would call for specific interventions nor does it identify specific categories of vulnerable girls (including those affected by migration) which would require specific attention. As such it is not clear how girls have been targeted and affected by implemented initiatives such as in fighting rape in Botswana or in eradicating violence against women and human trafficking in Mexico.
- 3) To recall, investing in girls especially the poorest girls in the most impoverished communities —for education, jobs, and health care—is imperative and critical if national governments seek to reduce poverty, manage urban and migration drifts and achieve sustainable development. In all countries and contexts, policies and programs must recognize the specific vulnerabilities of girls and decision-makers need to engage them in poverty reduction strategies. Such a framework is essential for girls to improve their livelihoods through self-sustaining employment prospects, education, health care, and social life.
- 4) In addition, it is widely recognised that the participation of those affected helps to ensure that programmes and policies respond to the concerns and rights of the affected population. This principle – and right – applies equally to adolescent girls in relation to migration.

E. Towards a human-centred and participatory approach to girls' migration

Impacts of migration, whether they are positive changes in living conditions or the more cataclysmic effects of isolation and exploitation are different for different populations. But inevitably children everywhere are badly affected, and girls in particular bear the greater burden. Their lives, prospects and human rights must be better protected. The full potential of migration will never be fully achieved without addressing the gender and age dimensions of migration, and girls themselves, their skills, knowledge and energy must be part of the search for solutions.

In many aspects and venues, girls worldwide demonstrate their critical awareness to the issues of migration and development. They spoke out about the impacts of migration on their lives; they discussed their needs, their fears and their dreams. Their words should inspire us to take action. However, in many national and international fora and in planning at more local levels adolescent girls' voices are still absent. Decisions on migration must be inclusive and participatory if they are to work. Sustainable migration and development initiatives require more effective action and a greater sharing of skills across the globe if they are meant to reach migrant girls.

Girls need to be involved and their voices listened – failing to do so would mean failing to tackle successfully the many challenges that migration presents us with, and therefore also failing to safeguard the rights of the most vulnerable and to share fairly the burdens and resources of migration.

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