

Youth migrants and the challenges they face

This year's International Youth Day on 12 August was celebrated under the theme "Youth Migration: Moving Development Further." Appropriately, on this day the United Nation's 2013 World Youth Report (WYR) was launched. The Report offers a multidimensional perspective of the life experiences of youth migrants, as well as some insights on the role of youth participation in migration-development policymaking and practice.

The National Geographic Society defines human migration as the movement of people from one place in the world to another for the purpose of taking up permanent or semi-permanent residence, usually across a political boundary. The United Nations defines international migrants as persons who reside outside of their country of origin for one year or more.

According to the United Nations, there are more than 214 million migrants worldwide, constituting more than 3 percent of the world's population, while some 33 million migrants are under the age of 20, which represents around 16 percent of the total migrant population. Around 20 million international migrants under 20 years of age reside in least developed and developing countries, accounting for 60 percent of the total migrant population under the age of 20. Child and adolescent migrants comprise the largest group of the total migrant population in Africa (28 percent).

The Director of the International Organisation for Migration, General Lacy Swing, states the following concerning the migrant situation of women and girls: "For many women and girls, migration is a way to fulfill their potential, to develop and to exercise their human rights. But being both a migrant and female also exposes them to risk – the risk of being subjected to violence." Swing asserts that women migrants predominantly work in the infor-

mal sector at jobs such as domestic work, agriculture and services which make them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Panelists at a United World Project "Harnessing the Human Development Potential of Youth Migrants" stress that young migrants, especially female migrants and migrants in irregular situations, face multiple challenges throughout the migration process – from pre-departure through in-transit, post-arrival and return, and reintegration to their own society. They are often misguided and susceptible to abuse and exploitation.

While migrating with children has certain advantages like family unity, and better health and education, disadvantages include exposing children to the dangers of unsafe travelling, discrimination, instability, and exclusion by language barriers from many opportunities. According to a report by UNICEF, children of migrant workers – whether they migrated with their parents or were born in the host country – run the risk of being denied access to basic services, including schools and health services.

Language difficulties are a serious impediment to the schooling of a child as well.

Children who are not in school – whether due to denial of access or the result of pressure to contribute to family earnings – turn to the labour market, and are also vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour, including the sex industry. Adolescent girls may be required to leave school or work for wages, sometimes in unsafe ways and away from their homes.

Although the Namibian Constitution provides for citizenship by birth within the country's territory if born to a citizen parent or a foreign parent ordinarily resident in the country, anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers in regions bordering Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana sometimes refused to teach children who could not prove citizenship.

Most illegal migrants live in open spaces, make-shift shelters or illegal settlements, which lack the basic infrastructure and access to civic amenities. They are highly prone to occupational health hazards and vulnerable to epidemics including HIV/AIDS. This vulnerability is exacerbated by weak legal protection. Children born abroad, particularly to undocumented migrants, may not have access to birth registration. Consequently, many children of migrant workers are not registered and may be stateless. Without proper documents, they can experience problems in access to basic services, and problems with the law. Children may be separated from their parent(s) in the event of arrest and detention; in some cases, children have been repatriated without adults.

Jo Rispol, another IOM representative, observes that "information is protection", adding that migrant youth and youth organisations need to be involved in the development process through ensuring the three "E's", i.e. engagement by giving them a voice/platform at meetings; enablement through skills and vocational training, and empowerment.

Undeniably, not much is known about youth migration and the hardships young people face in the host countries; therefore it's the responsibility of both Government and Civil Society organisations to do a lot more in raising awareness about the situation of migrants in our country.

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