

Protect my future

The links between child protection and population dynamics



In the post-2015 development agenda

March 2013

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Acknowledgements

This paper was written by Emily Delap, Head of Policy, Family for Every Child, and Daniela Reale, Exploited Children Advisor, Save the Children. It is part of an inter-agency series on the links between child protection and major development goals. Other papers in the series address subjects including governance, growth, equity and health.

Summary

Globally, populations are changing at a rapid rate, and it is essential that any efforts designed to improve the well-being of societies recognise and respond to these changes. This includes the design of the framework that will replace the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and consultations on the content of this framework rightly include specific attention to population dynamics. Key trends identified by the background paper for the consultations include: population growth, population ageing, urbanisation and migration.

In this paper we examine the impacts of these population dynamics on children, demonstrating that concerns about the protection and care of children are becoming ever more significant in the context of these trends. For example, there are rising numbers of children in many developing nations, with a significant and growing proportion of these girls and boys left vulnerable by a loss of parental care.

High rates of adult and child migration have a substantial impact on child well-being. Children are increasingly a major part of population movements, and when they move children are often exposed to violence and abuse at the hands of exploiters or traffickers, and in some cases by the very people who are supposed to protect them, such as law enforcement and border officials. Children on the move still fall through the cracks in child protection systems or are failed by the priority given to policing migration flows over the fulfilment of child rights obligations. Other children are left behind when parents migrate, and whilst such migration may in some cases improve children's material well-being, it can have devastating consequences for their emotional well-being and exposure to abuse and exploitation.

In part as a consequence of this migration, rising numbers of children are growing up in cities where they often lose the protection and care offered by wider family and kinship networks. Urban children are also vulnerable as a consequence of high levels of violence and crime, and exposure to particular forms of hazardous child labour. Factors such as migration and the HIV pandemic mean that there are substantial numbers of skipped generation households in some regions, and children are increasingly being brought up by their grandparents. These older people are not getting the support they need, placing both them and the children in their care at risk.

Given this evidence of rising abuse, neglect and exploitation, a post-MDG framework which properly addresses the impacts of changing population dynamics on children will include a specific goal and indicators on child protection. For example:

Ensure all children live a life free from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation and thrive in a safe family environment.

It is also essential that this framework monitors progress for sections of the population made vulnerable by changing population dynamics. This will help to ensure that children impacted by migration, children outside of parental care, and children from poorer urban centres all gain from any progress being made. It is our hope that the addition of a child protection goal, and of indicators assessing equity in progress across the whole framework, will highlight the importance of child protection. This in turn should ensure well-resourced national child protection systems, with mutual benefits for those striving to improve children's protection and care, and those working to respond to the changing needs of changing populations.

Introduction

Globally, populations are changing at a rapid rate, and it is essential that any efforts designed to improve the well-being of societies recognise and respond to these changes. This includes the design of the framework that will replace the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and consultations on the content of this framework rightly include specific attention to population dynamics. Key trends identified by the background paper for the Global Thematic Consultation on Population Dynamics in the Post-2015 Development Agenda¹ include: population growth, population ageing, urbanisation and migration. In this paper we focus on some of these trends to illustrate the major impact of population dynamics on children, with a particular emphasis on their care and protection. We focus specifically on:

- The rising numbers of children in the developing world, many of whom are at risk as a consequence of living outside of parental care
- The growing rates of child migration and consequent exposure to trafficking and other forms of exploitation, abuse and neglect
- The impacts of rising adult migration on the children who are left behind
- The increasing vulnerability of children as a result of urbanisation
- The phenomenon of ‘skipped-generation’ households and the impacts on children and older people of the rising use of grandparent care.

Through these examples, we argue that several major population trends are leading to boys and girls around the world becoming increasingly exposed to inadequate care, exploitation, abuse and neglect. This combined evidence suggests that a post-MDG framework which acknowledges the dynamic needs of populations must consider the growing importance of a focus on children’s protection and care, an area neglected by the current MDGs.

Box 1: What is child protection and care?

For the purpose of this paper, child protection is defined as: ‘measures and structures to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children’ (Save the Children 2010).

Child protection is closely linked to the better care of children, which involves ensuring that more children grow up in safe and caring families, or, when this is not possible, have a range of high-quality alternative care choices open to them (UN 2010).

Rising numbers of vulnerable children in the developing world

Current population trends suggest that whilst population growth is stagnating in many richer nations, in more resource-constrained settings, numbers continue to rise rapidly. In 1950, around two-thirds

¹ See: <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/286149>.

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of the world's population lived in countries defined as 'less developed.' By 2050 it is estimated that 86 per cent of the world's population will be living in such countries. Many of these 'less developed' nations have populations with a substantial proportion of children. Whilst in countries such as the United States, Germany, Spain and Switzerland only around 15-20 per cent of the population is under 15 years old, in many poorer nations, over 40 per cent of the population is under 15 years old.² This suggests that growing resources and attention must be devoted to ensuring the well-being of such children.

There is widespread evidence to suggest that a major factor affecting the well-being of these rapidly expanding populations of children is another population trend: the rising numbers of children living outside of parental care. For example, in many African nations up to 30 per cent of children already live apart from their parents (UNICEF 2008a). As demonstrated below, growing child and adult migration is pushing more families apart in many parts of the world, and the already significant numbers of children living without parents is likely to be further increased by factors such as the lasting impacts of the HIV pandemic, and rising conflict and dislocation as a result of climate change (EveryChild 2009). The loss of parental care is devastating for children, especially if they are not taken in by other close family members, with children living with distant relatives, in institutional care, on the streets or with employers especially vulnerable. Evidence clearly shows that children who live apart from parents are at greater risk of exploitation and abuse, and suffer negative health and education consequences (EveryChild et al. 2010). Despite this evidence, investments in support for families, in safer forms of alternative care (such as foster care or supported kinship care), and in broader child protection systems, is woefully inadequate. Government departments responsible for children's protection and care are amongst the least well-resourced in the world (Harper and Jones 2008; Child Frontiers 2011).

Growing child migration exposing children to abuse and exploitation

Children make up a significant part of the large-scale and complex population movements currently taking place in many parts of the world and the number of children who are 'on the move' is growing dramatically. It is estimated that there are approximately 750 million internal migrants and 214 million international migrants globally today. Many of them are children or young people moving, either alone or with their parents, on a permanent or seasonal basis, and 33 million migrants worldwide are thought to be under the age of 20, including 11 million children between the ages of 15 and 19 years. Of these, approximately 60 per cent live in the least developed and developing countries (UNICEF 2012b).³

Children move for a variety of reasons and the patterns and consequences of their movement are

² Figures in this section taken from: <http://www.prb.org/>

³ There are regional variations among migrants under 20 years of age. In Europe and Northern America, Africa and Oceania, 15 to 19-year-olds represent 39, 34, and 32 per cent of the total migrant population under the age of 20, respectively. In Asia, 10 to 14-year-olds represent 26 per cent of all migrants under 20, while in Latin America and the Caribbean, 5 to 9-year-olds account for 27 per cent of the total migrant population under 20 years of age (Abramovich et al. 2010).

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complex and diverse. For some children, leaving their homes, with or without their parents or a trusted adult, promises the chance of a better life, an escape from poverty and the opportunity to access education, employment and other basic services that would not be available at home (Save the Children 2007a; Reale 2008; Save the Children 2008; Save the Children 2012a; UNDP 2009). For children escaping violence at home, conflict and natural disaster, migration can be one of the very few survival strategies left to them (Reale 2008; Save the Children 2008; Save the Children 2012a; Zhou 2006).

"I saw back home that I was forever sitting. You get depressed from just sitting the whole day, doing nothing; seeing other people going to school, going to college. In South Africa maybe I will find a better life or even start college..." (Young person from Zimbabwe, cited in Global Movement for Children 2010 p.7)

"In Mozambique, my family didn't take care of me. They did not care if I had anything to eat or wear ... so I thought I would come here to South Africa because maybe I would find someone who would take care of me as their own." (Young boy in South Africa, cited in Global Movement for Children 2010 p. 7)

While it can open up new opportunities for children and their families, migration can also expose children to serious risks of abuse, exploitation and violence. Especially if travelling alone, and at key points such as border crossings, travel can become particularly perilous and children on the move are often subject to physical violence, theft and sexual exploitation or abuse by individuals or groups who take advantage of their uncertain status. State actors such as border police or law enforcement officials may also perceive child migrants as criminals and mistreat them. Young girls migrating to South Africa are often reported as being forced to have sex with border guards to secure entry, and children report swimming through dangerous rivers, risking their lives crossing borders (Save the Children 2008; Terre des Hommes 2008). Similarly, consultations with children who followed diverse migration routes all provide a grim picture of the extreme risks and forms of abuse and violence that many children are subject to when crossing borders (Save the Children 2012a).

"I paid smugglers and they hid me in a truck with a lot of people. There was no air and no space. I was lying for 36 hours in a container small like a grave. Some people died." (Boy, 17, from Afghanistan, who migrated to Serbia, cited in Save the Children 2012a p. 4)

"Police are often suspicious of migrant children. They insult them and beat them with no reason. Border officials didn't believe me. And beat me. They forced me to say that I was older than 18." (Young boy, cited in Save the Children 2012a p. 4)

As we show below, many children migrate to poor communities in cities where vulnerability to child rights abuses is especially high. Child migrants living in cities are particularly vulnerable as they will lack the protective ties normally available in families and communities and might not know anyone to whom they can turn for help. Both in transit and at their destination, they are often unconnected to the communities through which they pass or in which they settle. Their lack of documentation, language barriers or the stigmatisation against them often means that they deliberately avoid contact with others. Their isolation makes them particularly vulnerable. Recent evidence suggests, for example, that migrant children are more exposed to worse forms of child labour compared to non-migrants when comparing working hours, exposure to work hazards, bondage, violence and isolation (ILO 2012).

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Despite being obliged under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to protect all children – irrespective of their status or place of origin – many governments still perceive children on the move as threats or offenders against migration laws, leaving them without adequate protection. Because of their migration status, they can be denied the right to seek asylum or be placed in immigration detention or forcibly deported. The detention of children is becoming more frequent and is being used throughout the process from the point of entry or interception in the community, during the process of status determination and in preparation for repatriation. It is also used as a substitute for care arrangements and in such settings children are often exposed to severely inadequate living conditions, lack any access to education or other services and are often separated from family members. The International Detention Coalition estimates that there are thousands of migrant children placed in detention every day, and hundreds of thousands every year, in countries including Australia, Greece, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, South Africa and the United States (IDC 2012).

“Border officials found me and immediately deported me from Italy to Greece. I was in detention for 30 days. So many people were in one room, adults and children. There was no space for all of us to lie down to sleep.”
(Boy, 17, from Afghanistan, who migrated to Serbia, cited in Save the Children 2012a. p. 5)

The reality for many children who arrive at a new location, particularly those with no legal status, can be very daunting. Despite the fact that many children and their families leave their countries of origin to access services and education, many children on the move find it difficult to access basic services, mainly due to the lack of documentation, the fear of being deported and the lack of money to pay for these services. The risk of exploitation, discrimination and stigma mean that many children find it difficult to integrate or find a safe home. Children who may have international protection needs may also face difficulties in accessing asylum because of the lack of child-appropriate asylum procedures, access to legal assistance or guardianship, and lack of accessible information to support them. For many children, including children whose parents are irregular migrants, a lack of documentation or any possibility of accessing birth registration documents means that they become stateless with devastating effects on children, young people and their families’ ability to access services, go to work, own property, and move freely within the country. There are an estimated five million stateless children worldwide (Open Society Justice Initiative 2011).

In many cases, children on the move are immediately repatriated without any assessment of what is in their best interests, or of the adequacy of the reception structures in their country of origin. The identification and implementation of a long-term solution for a child involved in migration – being in the country of destination, the country of origin or in a third country – is a complex process which requires an assessment to ensure that the child has access to adequate care, education and training, protection and support and processes for monitoring progress in his or her integration. Additionally, children’s own views on the reasons for migrating and the objectives they wanted to pursue through migration are rarely taken into account, despite them often being the ones choosing to leave home. It is vital that a decision that incorporates the best interests of the child and the asylum and immigration requirements of the destination country is made soon after the child or young person arrives. A focus on children’s best interests in immigration decisions allows the child to either return safely if that is appropriate or to remain on a permanent and secure basis if safe return is not possible.

“In the Centre, there are people who provide help, but they are talking just to adults.” (Girl, 15, from Somalia, consulted in Serbia and cited in Save the Children 2012a p. 7)

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A range of studies on children on the move indicate that too often policies do not adequately respond to the specific needs of these children or are applied in ways that are not reflective of the best interests of the child (Reale 2008). Lack of coherence between migration and child protection policies is compounded by the lack of coordination in protection systems that channel different groups of children on the move, such as children who have been trafficked, children seeking asylum, children who migrate, and children displaced by conflict or natural disasters, into different category-oriented protection responses and services which are subject to often conflicting political priorities. Yet, children often move in and out of these different categories within the same journey or over time and, as such, they need protection and support mechanisms that are holistic, coherent and coordinated within and between countries.

The millions of children currently on the move cannot be ignored, especially as their numbers are likely to grow.⁴ The abuse, exploitation and neglect faced by the rising numbers of child migrants again highlights the importance of greater investments in child protection in the context of current population dynamics, as too many children on the move are currently failed by a lack of appropriate systems of protection. This suggests that it is important to:

- Ensure that no children are forced into unsafe migration due to poverty or abuse and neglect in the home. Invest in strategies to address the root causes that might force children to embark on risky migration such as better social protection and family support services; access to basic services; and child protection systems which enable the monitoring of and response to abuse and neglect within the home.
- Properly take into account issues of child mobility and build on the opportunities that migration opens up for children and their families while ensuring that children are protected from the risks of unsafe migration in accordance with international standards, particularly the UNCRC. Strategies focusing simplistically on trying to stop the movement of young children are not likely to be effective or adequate.
- Ensure that the integration of migrants in destination countries, including the removal of barriers to accessing services (education, health and appropriate alternative care for children who need it), also includes the right of children on the move to access these services irrespective of their migration status. Migration policies and procedures affecting children should be based on the best interests of the child principle, including in determining what the best long-term solutions are for a migrant child.
- Ensures that children on the move are more visible in national and global data collection instruments including national surveys (for example on poverty, remittances, fertility, child protection – including child labour, etc), and global surveys such as those which monitor progress against the MDGs.

⁴ This increase is driven by global migration trends fuelled by factors such as poverty, the rise in global youth unemployment rates fuelled by the global economic crisis as well as other demographic, political and economic trends (ILO 2012), and the impacts of climate change.

Increasing numbers of children 'left behind' by adult migration

The rising rates of migration described above do not just affect children who themselves migrate; there are also increasing numbers of children being 'left-behind' by migrating parents, with a major impact on child well-being. In rural China, up to 28 per cent of children are left behind by migrating parents (Jia and Tian 2010). In Moldova, in some communities over a quarter of children have one parent living overseas and almost 10 per cent have both parents living abroad (UNICEF 2007a). Parental migration is also extremely common in much of Latin America and the Caribbean (UNICEF 2007b).

The economic consequences of such migration have long been analysed. In recent years, there has also been a growing recognition of the impact of parental migration on the nature and quality of caring relationships, and on children's exposure to violence, abuse and exploitation (UNICEF 2010a). Evidence suggests that whilst children may gain materially from remittances, they often suffer emotionally, and are placed at risk of child protection violations as a result of their parents migrating (UNICEF 2010a).

When men migrate children usually remain within the care of their mothers. Research in Latin America shows how 'left behind' mothers commonly suffer from depression and may struggle to cope with children who often resent the absence of their fathers and behave in difficult ways (UNICEF 2010a). When women migrate or when both parents leave, it is common for children to be placed with a female relative, commonly a grandmother. Such new homes can offer children a protective and caring environment. However, problems may also occur, and as discussed in more detail below, grandparents commonly face many challenges due to an absence of support. Children, especially those living with more distant relatives, may suffer problems if remittances reduce and levels of stress and resentment in the household increase (UNICEF 2010a). When relationships break down, children in regions such as Central Asia are commonly placed in harmful institutional care (UNICEF 2009).

Research from around the world demonstrates how the children of migrating parents can suffer from low self-esteem and feelings of abandonment. For adolescents, this can affect social relationships, with a tendency for many of the children of migrants to isolate themselves in small social groupings (UNICEF 2010a). Research in Jamaica and Moldova shows that children with absent parents are more likely to engage in risky behaviour, including drug and alcohol abuse (UNICEF 2007a/b). The migration of parents, especially of a mother, has been shown to place children at higher risk of physical and sexual abuse, and of coming into conflict with the law (UNICEF 2007b; UNICEF 2010a). In many regions, the children of parents who have migrated are also expected to take on greater responsibility in the home, and such work can impact on their schooling (UNICEF 2007b; UNICEF 2010a).

This evidence suggests that responses to growing adult migration must recognise the impacts on children left behind. In addition to checking that remittances adequately meet the material needs of children who have been 'left behind,' efforts must be made to respond to children's emotional vulnerability, and to the heightened risk of abuse or exploitation. As with child migration, it is also important to work towards a world where families are not pushed apart by poverty, and for greater efforts to be made to ensure that parents can care for their own children through, for example, better social protection. Further efforts may also need to be made to reunite children with their parents once

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parents are settled in their new country. International guidance suggests that children should only ever be separated from parents if it is in their best interests, and maximum efforts must be made to strengthen families to enable them to care for children (UN 1989; UN 2010).

Heightened child vulnerability as a result of urbanisation

The mass migration described above is often from rural areas into cities, and this migration, combined with the natural growth of existing populations, means that children around the world are increasingly growing up in urban settings. The UN estimates that by 2025 60 per cent of children from developing countries will live in cities (UN cited in UNICEF 2010b). As noted by UNICEF:

“The experience of childhood is increasingly urban. Over half the world’s people, including more than a billion children, now live in cities and towns.” (UNICEF 2012c p.iii)

Whilst children are abused, neglected and exploited in all settings, cities expose children to particular risk. Urbanisation has been shown to lead to dislocation from extended family support networks, leaving parents to bring up children alone. There are also higher rates of divorce and single parenthood in urban than in rural areas in many settings (UNICEF 2010b; UNICEF 2012a; Roby 2011). Parents struggling to cope may leave children without proper supervision whilst they work, or may in some instances take the difficult decision to relinquish their children into harmful institutional care (UNICEF 2012a; UNICEF 2010b). Research in the Pacific shows how children not properly cared for by parents in cities sometimes engage in commercial sexual exploitation or transactional sex in order to survive (UNICEF 2010b).

Ties to wider communities may also be weaker in urban areas, and children may be denied the protection of community or religious leaders and broader kinship groups. As noted above, this may especially be the case for migrant children, and ties with wider communities may be also be particularly weak in settings where many urban residents live in informal settlements, and are required to move regularly due to mass evictions (UNICEF 2012c). Global research further suggests that community-based child protection mechanisms, which consist of groups of community members monitoring and responding to cases of abuse, exploitation and neglect, are far less common in urban than in rural areas (Wessells 2009).

Recent participatory research in seven African cities shows how the absence of safe spaces for play leaves children vulnerable to sexual abuse and substance addiction. Travelling around cities also makes children vulnerable, and many children, especially girls, experience abuse on their way to school, and within classrooms (Save the Children 2012b).

“I don’t feel safe to walk to school because of violence in this area, especially from people who are drunk. I also fear to be beaten by the teacher when I am at school.” (Young boy from a city in Zambia, cited in Save the Children 2012b p.25)

“We are not safe, there is no protection, and we are not confident to walk freely on the streets because we are terrified of harassment.” (Girl from a city in Ethiopia, cited in Save the Children 2012b p.26)

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Crime rates are generally higher in urban than in rural areas and children are exposed as victims, witnesses and perpetrators, placing them in frequent contact with law enforcement officials (UNICEF 2012c). Sadly, evidence shows that far from helping vulnerable children, police forces and others responsible for upholding the law often either fail to act, or actually harm children themselves (UNICEF 2012a; Save the Children 2012b). Participatory research in African cities shows how many children fear the police (Save the Children 2012b).

“A child can be defiled, but people are silent. A child is battered, but people are silent. Even a child can be forced to work, but people keep silent.” (A paralegal working for an NGO in a Zambian city, cited in Save the Children 2012b p.28)

Whilst the agricultural work carried out by their rural counterparts is often extremely damaging to children, children in cities are exposed to particular forms of hazardous child labour. This may include work in factories, selling items or begging on busy streets, and child domestic work in the homes of wealthier urban residents (ILO 2011). The latest available figures suggest that globally there are at least 15.5 million child domestic workers, representing almost five per cent of all economically active children, with more girls than boys engaged in domestic work, and such work being especially common in urban settings. Domestic work exposes children to numerous hazards, from cooking with hot stoves and carrying heavy loads, to physical, verbal and sexual abuse from employers (Blagbrough 2008).

Some children in cities are especially vulnerable including those who live and/or work on the streets. These girls and boys are commonly engaged in harmful child labour, and may be exposed to the heightened risk of sexual abuse as a consequence of a lack of secure shelter. Children who are connected to the streets in some settings are often deemed a nuisance by authorities and at risk of police round-ups (UNICEF 2012c). Children with disabilities in cities have also been shown to be at particular risk of violence and abuse (Save the Children 2012b).

This evidence suggests that greater attention must be paid to children living in poor communities in urban settings. The needs of these children are often ignored as their poverty and vulnerability is masked by the high levels of wealth and good access to services that often surrounds them in richer neighbourhoods (UNICEF 2010b; UNICEF 2012a). Efforts to assist such children must of course include work to address their health, education, access to clean water and shelter. However, it is also essential that proper investments are made in protecting children in urban areas from the enhanced risk of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect.

The growing number of ‘skipped generation’ households and the impacts on children and carers

Factors such as the adult migration described above and the HIV pandemic mean that there are rising numbers of ‘skipped-generation’ households in some regions in which older carers are responsible for the care of grandchildren (UNFPA and HelpAge International 2012). Research in 21 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa reveals that 66 per cent of children who have lost both parents live with

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grandparents, with grandparents increasingly substituting for the care that used to be provided by aunts and uncles (Beegle et al. 2009). In Moldova research suggests 91 per cent of the 35,000 boys and girls with both parents abroad live with grandparents, with around a third of the 75,000 children with one parent living overseas being cared for by grandparents (HelpAge International 2008; HelpAge International 2011a). In Thailand, 47 per cent of children orphaned as a result of HIV are cared for by grandparents (Roby 2011).

In many instances, these arrangements are perceived by both children and carers as being mutually beneficial. Many grandparents report satisfaction in being able to assist in a time of family crisis, and may enjoy practical support from grandchildren too. Girls and boys who cannot be cared for by parents commonly express a strong preference for grandparent care due to the unconditional love such carers are felt to offer (EveryChild 2010; Mann 2004; Kuyini et al. 2009; Save the Children 2007b). In addition to these preferences, there is also evidence to suggest that grandparent care is better for both children and wider societies than many of the alternatives when parents are absent or deceased. In common with other forms of kinship care, it shows better outcomes in terms of child well-being and development, and is cheaper than other forms of alternative care such as foster or residential care (EveryChild and HelpAge 2012).

"It is a great privilege to be able to look after my grandchildren. At least I feel that I am able to do something for my own children who have passed on."

"The children bring a lot of energy and joy into the home. They are keeping me young."
(Older carers in Africa, cited in HelpAge International and REPSSI 2011 p.5)

"My granny is the kindest one in the world. She cooks tasty dishes, worries about us and always waits for us to come home from school." (Child cared for by grandparents in Krygyzstan, HelpAge International 2011b, p.13)

Despite these benefits, grandparents commonly receive no or minimal external assistance and these older people often struggle to provide for the children in their care (JLICA 2009; Boon et al. 2010). Common challenges faced by children and their grandparent carers include:

- High levels of poverty, in part due to lack of adequate access to pensions and other cash transfers such as child benefits (EveryChild and HelpAge International 2012; HelpAge International 2008; Kuo and Operario 2009).
- Challenges with schooling as grandparents struggle to provide both financial support for children's schooling and help with homework (HelpAge 2011b).
- Problems with mental and physical health with grandparents suffering the strain of bringing up young children in old age, and both children and carers experiencing anxiety about uncertain futures and the lasting impacts of the death, violence and abuse that often bring children into grandparent care (HelpAge 2005; Makadzange and Dolamo 2011).
- Challenges with parenting and inter-generational conflict, with older carers often finding it hard to understand the younger generation, and commonly struggling with disciplining the children in their care (EveryChild and HelpAge 2012).

"I worry about what will happen to the children after I am gone, and my own health is not so good these days."
(Older carer from Africa, cited in HelpAge International and REPSSI 2011, p.19)

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"It is quite tiring caring for my grandchild because he is very naughty and does not listen to me at all." (60-year-old grandmother from Thailand, HelpAge 2005 p.13)

The evidence presented in this section clearly shows how efforts to respond to ageing populations must include a recognition of grandparents' role as carers, for the benefit of older people, and for ensuring the adequate care of children. This requires a cross-sectoral response which includes: wider access to adequate pensions and other cash grants (such as child benefits); health care systems that recognise the physical and psycho-social needs of children in grandparent care and older carers; and education systems that respond to the particular vulnerabilities of children in grandparent care and are able to offer adequate support in their schooling, psychosocial support and protection. Importantly, to better support grandparents and the children in their care it is also essential to build strong systems of child protection and alternative care which acknowledge and support the role played by grandparent carers, for example through training social workers to enable them to better support grandparent carers.

Conclusion and recommendations

Concerns about the protection and care of children are becoming ever more significant in our changing world. There are rising numbers of children in many developing nations, with a significant and growing proportion of these girls and boys left vulnerable by a loss of parental care.

High rates of adult and child migration have a substantial impact on child well-being. Children are increasingly a major part of population movements, and when they move children are exposed to violence and abuse at the hands of exploiters or traffickers, and in some cases by the very people who are supposed to protect them, such as law enforcement and border officials. Children on the move still fall through the cracks of child protection systems or are failed by the priority given to policing migration flows over the fulfilment of child rights obligations. Other children are left behind when parents migrate, and whilst such migration may in some cases improve children's material well-being, it can have devastating consequences for their emotional well-being and exposure to abuse and exploitation.

In part as a consequence of this migration, rising numbers of children are growing up in cities where they often lose the protection and care offered by wider family and kinship networks. Urban children are also vulnerable as a consequence of high levels of violence and crime, and exposure to particular forms of hazardous child labour. Factors such as migration and the HIV pandemic mean that there are substantial numbers of skipped generation households in some regions, and children are increasingly being brought up by their grandparents. These older people are not getting the support they need, placing both them and the children in their care at risk.

Given this evidence of rising abuse, neglect and exploitation, a post-MDG framework which properly addresses the impacts of changing population dynamics on children will include a specific goal and indicators on child protection. For example:

Ensure all children live a life free from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation and thrive in a safe family environment.

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It is also essential that this framework monitors progress for sections of the population made vulnerable by changing population dynamics. This will help to ensure that children impacted by migration, children outside of parental care, and children from poorer urban centres all gain from any progress being made. It is our hope that the addition of a child protection goal, and of indicators assessing equity in progress across the whole framework, will highlight the importance of child protection. This in turn should ensure well-resourced national child protection systems, with mutual benefits for those striving to improve children's protection and care, and those working to respond to the changing needs of changing populations.

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