

Not for Adults Only: Toward a Child's Lens in Migration Policies in Asia

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Executive Summary

Having experienced substantial international migration since the 1970s, countries in East, South, and Southeast Asia have developed laws, institutions, policies, and programs to govern various aspects of international migration. Children, however, who comprise a significant share of the world's international migrants, have not received as much policy attention as adults. Children are part of the region's international migration experience (e.g., children left behind in the countries of origin when their parents migrate for work, children as migrants, and children as members of multicultural families). This article provides an overview of the challenges faced by children as migration actors, and the policy responses and programs that select countries in the region have developed to address children's experiences and concerns.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, which many Asian countries have endorsed, set forth objectives, commitments, and actions, informed by the principle of promoting the best interests of the child and child protection, which specifically address the needs of children. These include actions to promote universal birth registration, enhance access to education and health and social services regardless of migrant and legal status, and otherwise create inclusive and socially cohesive societies. Most countries in Asia have yet to meet these standards. Endorsing the two compacts was a first step. The good practices that have been implemented in a number of countries provide a template for how to translate these objectives into action and how to ensure that the full protection and best interests of migrant children, the left-behind children of migrant workers, and those who are part of multicultural families remain a priority.

Keywords

left-behind children, migrant children, multicultural children, Asia

Introduction

Until quite recently, children were invisible in the migration literature, and migration was viewed as an adult undertaking. "Grown-ups" were seen as the ones deciding whether to migrate for employment, marriage, permanent settlement, or other reasons. Like the view about women migrants in the past, children — defined as those younger than 18 years old — were mostly

considered associational migrants (i.e., moving with family members and not meriting as much attention). In light of changing migration patterns and new understandings of migration, children have increasingly assumed a central role in the migration literature and been viewed as a population that needs to be duly considered in migration policies. In the context of East, South-east, and South Asia, questions of how large-scale and

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unrelenting cross-border migrations affect and implicate children have entered academic and policy debates and, not least of all, public discourses around migration.

This article provides an overview of the challenges that different types of cross-border migration pose for children and the support systems provided to them in countries of origin and destination in East, South, and Southeast Asia. The three Asian subregions of interest have different migration systems. East Asia is largely a migrant destination region, with Hong Kong SAR, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea as major destination countries. South Asia is primarily an origin region: Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are source countries of migrant workers mostly to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Southeast Asia is a mosaic of origin and destination countries: the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar are mainly origin countries; Singapore and Brunei are destination countries; and Malaysia and Thailand are both origin and destination countries.

This article links the challenges and existing child-focused initiatives with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCM and GCR, respectively), landmark agreements that were adopted by the international community in 2018 to promote international cooperation in the governance of migration and to address large movements of migrants and refugees and protracted refugee situations. Although nonbinding, both agreements are important steps in articulating shared commitments and actions to govern these movements and protect migrants and refugees. Both agreements specifically mention child migrants and child refugees, and serve as benchmarks in discussing how migration affects children in the region and what policies and programs are required to respond to their needs and aspirations. The GCM “promotes existing international legal obligations in relation to the rights of the child, and upholds the principle of the best interests of the child at all times, as a primary consideration in all situations concerning children in the context of international migration, including unaccompanied and separated children” (GCM 2018, ¶ 15[h]). The GCR notes that children comprise more than half of the world’s refugees (GCR 2018, ¶ 76–77) and highlights “children, adolescents and youth” as a specific population in need of support.

Since the 1970s, international migration from and within Asia has soared due to (1) immigration reforms

in settlement countries that dismantled the preference for immigrants of European origin; (2) employment opportunities in the Middle Eastern, East Asian, and Southeast Asian labor markets; (3) episodes of refugee movements throughout the years; and (4) the emergence of other types of international migration, such as marriage migration and student migration. Legal channels to facilitate these migrations developed, but so did irregular migration, including human trafficking. While international migration from Asia to other regions continues, most international migration occurs within the region (UN 2017). As outlined in Figure 1, children figure in international migration as children who are (1) left behind by their parents who are working overseas,¹ (2) migrants themselves, and (3) born to international or cross-cultural marriages. Given the dominance of temporary labor migration, concerns about left-behind children have persisted in origin countries for the past 40 years. These concerns surfaced because the strictly temporary labor migration regime does not allow family reunification for migrant workers in less skilled occupations. Children can, however, join their migrant worker parents in destination countries by migrating through unauthorized channels, which is common in countries that share land borders.² In refugee movements or under conditions of trafficking, children may migrate unaccompanied by or separated from their families.

The separation between migrant workers and their family members has raised concerns about family relationships and the well-being of migrants and their left-behind families, especially the well-being of children. The anxieties about the adverse impacts of international labor migration on families in general and children in particular intensified when mothers also started working overseas. Family separation is less of a concern to professionals or highly skilled migrants because they have the option to bring their spouses and dependent children with them. Destination countries are more welcoming to professionals or highly skilled migrants.

The emergence of marriage migration in Asia, with nationals (mostly women) from developing countries (such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Cambodia) migrating to join their spouses in Japan, Taiwan, and

¹The term refers to children who are left behind in the home countries, but it does not imply being abandoned.

²Children born to migrant workers, however, are not registered in destination countries.

Left-behind children (Origin)	Child migrants/Migrant children (Destination)	Children of international marriages (Destination)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children of temporary migrant workers left in the origin countries (i.e., their parents work in less skilled occupations overseas) • [Children of international/cross-cultural relationships, children of international marriages] • [Children returning to origin country] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who migrate with their parents (permanent settlement) • Children who migrate with their professional/highly skilled parents (temporary labor migration) • Children who migrate with less skilled migrant worker parents (temporary labor migration; unauthorized migration) • Children who accompany their parents/family members (refugee movements) • Child migrant workers • Unaccompanied child migrants (including those who are trafficked) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children of "multicultural families" (as they are called in South Korea)

Figure 1. Children affected by international migration.

South Korea, has drawn attention to children of mixed cultural backgrounds. Marriage migration provides a pathway to permanent residence and citizenship, and raises the specter in destination states of multicultural citizenship and more culturally diverse societies.

In keeping with the objectives of the article, the next four sections discuss the following: (1) provisions concerning children in the GCM and GCR, (2) the challenges posed by international migration for children in select countries in Asia, (3) the policy and operational responses to support them, and (4) recommendations on how commitments to the GCM and GCR will sensitize countries in Asia to incorporate children’s issues and concerns in their migration policies and programs. The review is far from exhaustive. The article covers some countries better than others because of their different migration histories and varying institutional developments. Nonetheless, the review can serve as a starting point for advancing migration policies and programs in the region that reflect the best interests of children.

Addressing Children in the Global Compacts

Both the GCM and GCR recognize children as having specific needs, and they give due attention to children in their respective programs for action. Both are guided by the principles of promoting the best interests of the

child and child protection. The two compacts address the reality of unaccompanied and separated children and the need for best-interest assessments and determinations. Although both call for more concerted actions by the international community, the GCR focuses on promoting responsibility sharing in supporting refugees and easing the pressures on countries hosting refugees, while the 23 objectives and the corresponding actions of the GCM address origin, transit, and destination countries and their responsibilities in promoting safe, orderly, and regular migration. Seventeen of the GCM’s 23 objectives specifically mention necessary actions directed at children in different stages of migration, including before departure, while migrating or in transit, on arrival in their destination, and return and repatriation. Both compacts stress the following imperatives:

- *Documentation:* Both compacts underscore the importance of registration, documentation, and proof of legal identity. In refugee movements, the identification and registration of refugees are crucial to facilitate their access to basic assistance and protection, and to identify and meet their specific needs. For unaccompanied and separated children, the GCM requires specialized procedures for children’s identification, referral, care, family reunification, and access to basic social services. The GCM further enjoins states not to withhold basic services and deny human rights

to migrants who lack proof of nationality or legal identity (2018, ¶ 20.f). Both compacts call for reducing statelessness.

- *Safety throughout the migration cycle:* The compacts emphasize the need for accurate and timely information at all stages of the migration process, including child-accessible information on child-sensitive support, counseling, rights and obligations, and access to basic services. The GCM also calls for consular assistance and protection throughout the migration cycle, including child-sensitive actions on consular assistance to nationals in situations of vulnerability abroad (2018, 30.d).
- *Access to education and social services:* The GCR provides that refugee children and youth should be afforded access to education at all levels, and calls for financial resources to minimize the time that refugee children and youth are not in school to no more than three months on arrival in the community (2018, ¶ 68). The GCM provides for “inclusive and equitable quality education to migrant children and youth” and access to lifelong learning opportunities (2018, ¶ 31.f). It also proposes the promotion of welcoming and safe school environments that support the aspirations of migrant children (GCM 2018, Objective 16, ¶ 32.i).
- *Alternatives to detention:* The GCM seeks to explore alternatives to immigration detention (Objective 13), and it states that the “rights and best interests of the child” must be protected and respected “at all times, regardless of their migration status, by ensuring [the] availability and accessibility of a range of alternatives to detention in non-custodial context, favouring community-based care arrangements, that ensure access to education and healthcare, and respect their right to family life and family unity” (2018, ¶ 29.h). It urges states to work for an end to “the practice of child detention in the context of international migration” (ibid.). The GCR also stresses the need for noncustodial, community-based alternatives to detention, particularly for children (2018, ¶ 60).

Asian countries have yet to establish policies and practices that would adhere to the compacts’ commitments concerning children moving as migrants and refugees.

Children as Actors in International Migration in Asia

This section provides an overview of the challenges confronting left-behind children, those on the move, and children in multicultural families, and how each group is coping with their situations.

Left-Behind Children

The consequences of temporary labor migration on migrants and their families has been studied in Asia for some time. Among the countries of origin, the Philippines has been the site of considerable research probing the impact of temporary labor migration on children, including studies involving children’s own perspectives on how they had been affected by parental migration (e.g., Battistella and Conaco 1998; ECMI/AOS, SMC, and OWWA 2004; Parreñas 2005). Overall, research findings are either mixed or inconclusive about the perceived negative impacts of migration on left-behind children. An early study concluded that the children of migrants in the Philippines did not exhibit more psychological problems than children of nonmigrant parents (Battistella and Conaco 1998). Later studies found that children of migrants did well in school and had better outcomes compared to children of nonmigrants (Asis 2006; Asis and Ruiz-Marave 2013). The extended-family support system serves as a buffer for parental absence: grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives often serve as surrogate parents of the left-behind children (ECMI/AOS, SMC, and OWWA 2004; Aguilar et al. 2009).

In the 2000s, a unique data set from the Child Health and Migrant Parents in Southeast Asia (CHAMPSEA) research project generated data that are comparative (i.e., involving households with and without transnational migrant parents of children younger than 12 years old), drawn from mixed methods, and longitudinal. The data were based on research conducted in four countries: Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand. CHAMPSEA Wave 1 was conducted in 2008–2009 (a household survey and in-depth interviews with selected households were carried out in the four countries); Wave 2 was conducted in 2016–2017 in Indonesia and the Philippines, and was implemented in Thailand in late September 2019.³

³CHAMPSEA Wave 1 was coordinated by the National University of Singapore and the University of St. Andrews. It was

Overall, findings from the four-country study do not support the general perception that children who remain in origin countries while their parents work abroad are worse off or more disadvantaged than children who are residing with both parents. Another finding from the four-country study is that the impact of transnational labor migration on the health and well-being of children is multidirectional. Left-behind young children in the Philippines whose fathers were working overseas had reduced risk of stunting, an indicator of undernutrition characterized by low height for age, while in Vietnam having a migrant father was associated with stunting. There was no difference in reduced risk of stunting between children whose mothers were working overseas and those in nonmigrant households (Graham and Jordan 2013). In terms of educational outcomes, the left-behind children of migrant parents working overseas did not lag behind in school compared to children residing with both parents. In the Philippines, children whose fathers were working overseas had better school outcomes compared with other categories of children (i.e., those whose mothers were working overseas and those who live with both parents), an outcome that indicates the economic benefits of fathers' migration and the care provided by mothers.

Contrary to popular belief, the left-behind children of transnational migrant mothers were not worse off in terms of school pacing and achievement compared to children living with both parents (Asis and Ruiz-Marave 2013). The favorable school performance of the left-behind children of transnational migrant families reflects the benefits of remittances, which allow children to study in private schools and to receive educational support through tutorials and equipment such as

computers, and to participate in extracurricular activities. In Thailand, the children of migrant fathers were more resilient (i.e., defined as being happy, doing well in school, and enjoying life) than the children in nonmigrant households (Jampaklay and Vapattanawong 2013). Engaging in risky behaviors, such as drinking alcohol in Vietnam (Jordan, Graham, and Nguyen 2013) and smoking tobacco in Indonesia (Sukamdi and Wattie 2013), was not associated with parental migration. The study did not support the view that children of migrants were more likely to engage in risky practices. Overall, the various studies also did not support the notion of a care crisis when mothers migrate.⁴ When mothers migrate, family members continue to serve as caregivers for children, rather than paid domestic workers. In the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia, a notable share of fathers serve as the primary caregivers of children in migrant households.⁵

Children on the Move

As Figure 1 suggests, the category of migrant children comprises several types of children on the move. Access to education and the schooling experience of child migrants in three destination countries — Japan, Thailand, and Malaysia — are discussed below.

Children who are born in one country and migrate to another usually experience learning difficulties because of language. In Japan, migrant children who are not proficient in the Japanese language face severe disadvantages in school. When one or both parents are migrants and lack proficiency in Japanese, they cannot help their children with schooling. Particularly in Japan, mothers are expected to help with homework and to provide a supportive home environment for studying. If the mothers' Japanese is lacking, they cannot help the children with their assignments and school requirements. Being considered foreign in Japan, switching languages between school and home, and not being able to fully

implemented in Indonesia by Gadjah Mada University; in the Philippines by the Scalabrini Migration Center; in Vietnam by the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences; and in Thailand by Mahidol University. The Wellcome Trust (GR079946/B/06/Z and G079946/Z/06/Z) funded Wave 1. For Wave 2, the University of Hong Kong joined the coordinating team. Funding for Wave 2 came from the Singapore Ministry of Education Academic Research Fund Tier 2 (MOE2015-T2-1-008), and supplementary funding from the Hong Kong Research Grants Council through its General Research Fund (Project no. 17606815) and Social Science and Humanities Research Council Partnership Grant on "Gender, Migration, and the Work of Care" (File no. 895-2012-1021). For more information about CHAMPSEA, see <https://ari.nus.edu.sg/clusters/asian-migration/projects/champsea-home/>.

⁴These are some of the analyses from the CHAMPSEA Wave 1 data. For a list of CHAMPSEA publications (until 2017), see <https://ari.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/CHAMPSEA-Publications.pdf>. Papers based on Wave 2 and longitudinal analyses are forthcoming.

⁵The Scalabrini Migration Center produced a video report, "Rising to the Occasion: Father-Carers in Transnational Families in the Philippines" (see <https://smc.org.ph/index.php/multimedia/rising-to-the-occasion/>; Scalabrini Migration Center n.d.).

express themselves in either environment cause multiple pressures (Skof and Sangawa 2013). Aside from academics, migrant children also have a hard time adjusting to the mode of discipline and Japanese school culture (Jabar 2011).

Another source of pressure for migrant children is straddling the culture of their parents (or home country) and the culture of the destination country. This issue was a source of tension between children and parents among Japanese Brazilian migrant families in Japan.⁶ Japanese Brazilian migrant parents want to see their children maintain their identity as Brazilians, of which knowing and speaking the Portuguese language is a crucial marker. Some children identify more with Japanese culture. When the children lose facility in Portuguese, they cannot communicate with their parents, and they may encounter difficulties when they return to Brazil. The children of Japanese Brazilian migrants in Japan scored lower in mental health than the children of Japanese Brazilians who remain in Brazil. Such disparity has been attributed to the former's stress in adapting to a new cultural environment, isolation from the local Japanese community, and anxiety caused by their parents' downward social mobility relative to their social position in Brazil (Kondo et al. 2011).

For the children of asylum seekers, the lack of legal status in Japan makes for a life of uncertainty. Although Japan is a state party to the UN 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, its intake of refugees

is very low. Asylum seekers who are issued "provisional release" are allowed to reside in Japan while their asylum application is under review. Provisional release allows those with conditional deportation orders to reside outside a detention center, but they cannot work, they do not have health insurance, and they need permission to travel outside the prefecture where they live. The children, including those who were born in Japan, inherit the restrictions that come with their parents' status. A person whose asylum application is rejected is subject to deportation. Their children may be allowed to remain in Japan, however, if they wish to remain and if there is a guardian who will take care of them (Funakoshi, Miyazaki, and Wilson 2016). These choices are heartbreaking for families. If the children return with their deported parents, they are returning to their parents' "home country," which they may not know well or at all. If they remain in Japan, they face separation from their parents.⁷

Thailand and Malaysia have been grappling with high levels of irregular migration. About half of the 3–5 million migrant workers in Thailand (Blomberg and Wongsamuth 2019) and the 6–7 million migrant workers in Malaysia (Hunt 2019) are irregular migrant workers. The children of migrants in an irregular situation include those who migrated with their parents through irregular channels and those who are stateless. According to the International Observatory on Statelessness (IOS), stateless children in Malaysia include Rohingya children (15,000–70,000) and undocumented children of migrants in Sabah, mostly Indonesians (36,000) and an unknown number of Filipinos. In Thailand, an estimated 100,000 stateless children reside in border towns such as Mae Sot and Ranong, and an estimated 3,000–15,000 children are born every year to migrant workers from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos (IOS n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Because they lack permission to live legally in these countries, these children cannot attend school, cannot access healthcare, and face (with their families) the constant risk of deportation.

Children of International Marriages

The rise in international marriages in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan has increased cultural and racial diversity in these societies. Of the three destinations,

⁶Japanese Brazilian migrants are Brazilian nationals who are ethnically Japanese — they are descendants of the Japanese who immigrated to Brazil, mostly between 1917 and 1941 — and who returned to Japan for economic opportunities. Their migration to Japan was motivated by Japan's need for workers and was facilitated by Japan's migration policy. In 1990, Japan amended its Immigration Control Law to allow Japanese-descent foreigners (second- and third-generation descendants, or *nisei-jin* and *sansei-jin*, respectively) and their spouses to work in Japan without a time limit. Large numbers of Japanese Brazilians came to Japan with their families throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The economic crisis in 2008–2010 curbed further immigration and even saw the return of some Japanese Brazilians to Brazil. In July 2018, the Japanese government extended immigration to fourth-generation Japanese descendants based overseas who are single, 18–30 years old, and able to come and work in specific sectors for up to five years. There were no takers, however, among the Japanese Brazilians in Brazil, who may have been discouraged by the conditions and limits on the length of stay in Japan (Toyama 2018), unlike the more liberal policy in the 1990s.

⁷These heartbreaking decisions also arise when migrant parents are deported for overstaying their visas (Tanaka 2018).

South Korea is the only country to develop a policy of multiculturalism to incorporate foreign spouses and families formed by international marriages.

Between 2000 and 2016, South Korea registered 472,390 international marriages; the numbers peaked in 2005, reaching 42,356 (Lim 2017). In 2005, the Korean media started discussions about multiculturalism, against the backdrop of an aging society and falling birthrates. Although foreign workers were filling labor shortages and international marriages were helping to curb falling birthrates, prejudices against foreigners remained strong. From 2005, the Korean government promoted a multicultural policy to welcome foreign workers and promote the integration of foreign spouses in Korean society. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) was at the forefront of promoting multiculturalism, lobbying for passage of the 2008 Support for Multicultural Families Act. The law increased the budget to support a variety of programs to promote the acceptance of foreign workers and the integration of foreign spouses and mixed-race children. According to MOGEF, as of 2016, some 217 Multicultural Family Support Centers had been established across the country to provide assistance to multicultural families. These centers offer Korean language lessons and orientation to Korean culture to foreign spouses and their children. Public school teachers have been trained to respond to the bullying of mixed-race children. The Korean approach, thus, can be described as top-down, with a national policy to promote multiculturalism that is expected to cascade to local communities. By contrast, Japan's approach rests more on the initiative of local governments, with contributions from nonprofit organizations and migrant or ethnic communities (Asis and Liao 2017). Despite the national approach in Korea and the more local response in Japan, some children in multicultural families experienced bullying at school because of their skin color or their difficulty with the Japanese or Korean language (Asis and Liao 2017).

In Taiwan, the influx of foreign workers and foreign brides, mostly from Southeast Asia, transformed Taiwan's demographic and social makeup. As of 2017, 174,839 spouses from Southeast Asia resided in Taiwan (Hsiao and Yang 2018). One in eight primary school students comes from a multicultural family (Ting 2009, as cited in Liao and Wang 2013). According to the Ministry of Education, K-12 schools have an estimated 80,000 students with a Vietnamese parent and 20,000 with an

Indonesian parent (Fulco 2018). New immigrant children are a source of concern to the Taiwanese population because they have poorer academic performance and poorer interpersonal skills compared to children born to Taiwanese parents (Chin and Yu 2009). There are fears that children born to poor, less educated, and non-Chinese-speaking mothers will erode Taiwan's international competitiveness (Kuo 2011). Some Taiwanese parents do not send their children to schools where there are many children from international-marriage families for fear that their children will be exposed to an inferior environment (Hsu, Chi-chung, and Jo-yao 2019).

Lack of language proficiency hinders non-Taiwanese mothers from taking a more active role in supporting their children's education, which affects the children's academic performance (Sheu 2007). Stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination toward non-Taiwanese mothers and their children diminish the self-esteem of these individuals and impede their integration in Taiwanese society (Chen and Chin 2008; Chin and Yu 2009).

Examples of Policies and Programs Supporting Children Affected by Migration

The separation between migrant workers and their left-behind families has been a long-standing concern in Asian countries that send temporary migrant workers to more developed economies in the region. Due to widespread temporary labor migration in the region, the concerns of left-behind children in several countries have received more policy attention than the two other groups of children. The experiences of origin countries in the region in responding to the issues of the left-behind children can expand the reach of the GCM and GCR, which mostly focus on migrant children and refugee children in the destination countries.

Addressing the Needs of the Left-Behind Children

Government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the Philippines have developed interventions to provide support and services to the left-behind children of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). Government efforts in this regard have been helped by a government agency, the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), which provides welfare services to migrant workers and their families. OWWA offers scholarship

programs to the children of OFWs, as well as to other qualified dependents, mostly to support college education. OWWA has also launched the Information Technology (IT) Training Program to families and dependents of OFWs to upgrade the latter's IT skills, and particularly to promote communication with OFWs using IT facilities (OWWA n.d.). Several NGOs run psychosocial support programs, such as art and theater workshops, psychosocial counseling, retreats, and summer camps.⁸ Some initiatives, such as those by Atikha and the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (ECMI-CBCP), offer training programs to enable teachers and counselors to provide psychosocial support to students with migrant parents. Both organizations also offer training to integrate migration issues into the curriculum of elementary and high school students. Several schools with large numbers of students with OFW parents have formed support organizations for and by such students. ECMI-CBCP has been running an annual search for Outstanding Sons and Daughters of OFWs to recognize the achievements of elementary and high school students. The former is for Luzon students only, while the latter has a nationwide reach. The awards provide a counter-narrative to common perceptions that children of OFWs are neglected and delinquent, lack parental guidance, and stop schooling. Although the work of NGOs is important, their reach is limited to areas where they are present. Effective and sustainable mechanisms will need to involve the cooperation of government agencies, civil society organizations (Lam et al. 2013), and migrants and their families.

In South Asia, India (particularly the state of Kerala) and Sri Lanka also have long experience with temporary labor migration, and they share concerns about the perceived adverse impacts of parental migration on their children. In Kerala, the children of migrant workers

reportedly exhibit "Gulf syndrome," a condition characterized by multiple psychosocial problems (Soyuz and Pandian 2014). In Sri Lanka, which used to have a high level of female outmigration,⁹ worries about the perceived ill effects of mothers' migration on young children led the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs to secure approval from the Cabinet of Ministers to impose a ban on women migrating for work abroad if they had children younger than age five. In 2013, the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment introduced the regulation known as the Family Background Report (FBR), which reaffirmed the ban on prospective migrant women who had children younger than five years from seeking work overseas; in addition, it required the appointment of a "proper" female guardian for women migrants who had children older than five years old. Although the FBR was aimed at ensuring the welfare of the children of women migrant workers, an assessment conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2017 found that (1) the regulation gave rise to irregular migration, which rendered migrant women more vulnerable; (2) the FBR did not ensure the well-being of children, since there was no follow-up; (3) the FBR did not consider the welfare of the children of male migrant workers and those of migrant women in other occupations; and (4) it undermined the role of fathers as caregivers (ILO 2017). Other studies have suggested (e.g., Shlala 2017) that there could be interventions other than restricting the migration of mothers, such as expanding opportunities for local employment so that women need not work overseas, or the government providing boarding schools for the children of migrant mothers and providing pensions.

Although family members fill the role of migrant parents, children would prefer to have both parents living with them. When the care of children falls to grandparents, the latter may be constrained in fulfilling this role. In Cambodia, for example, a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) study found that grandparents cannot adequately provide care and material support to the left-behind children of migrant parents (Howard 2017). At present, there are no programs and services for migrants and families in Cambodia. The study recommends action at national and subnational levels to ensure that public services — healthcare, nutrition, and

⁸For details, see ECMI-CBCP (<https://www.facebook.com/ecmi.cbcp>), Atikha (<https://www.atikha.org/programs/school-based-program-in-addressing-the-social-cost-of-migration.html>), Mindanao Migrants Center for Empowering Actions, Inc. (MMCEAI; <http://mindanaomigrant.com/>), Kaagapay Overseas Filipino Workers Resource and Service Center, Inc. (<https://www.facebook.com/kaagapay.ofw>), and UGAT Foundation, Inc. (<https://www.facebook.com/UGAT-FOUNDATION-INC-138519023107/>), among others.

⁹At its peak, 75 percent of Sri Lankan migrant workers were women.

subsidies for education — are accessible to those who need these services the most. Countries such as Cambodia may also learn from the experiences of other origin countries, such as the Philippines, in responding to the needs of left-behind families and children.

Programs for Migrant Children

Many policies and programs in support of migrant children focus on education-related initiatives; some of these interventions are initiated by countries of origin or by migrant communities.¹⁰

To meet the education needs of children who accompany their parents who are temporarily working overseas, origin countries such as the Philippines, India, and Bangladesh have established schools overseas that are regulated by and follow the curriculum of their countries' education ministry. For example, the Philippine Schools Overseas (PSOs) were established in countries with sizable Filipino populations. As of 2015, 40 PSOs had been established (mostly in the Gulf region) offering preschool, elementary, and high school education. The PSOs follow the Philippine curriculum and also promote awareness of Filipino culture to Filipino youth overseas. The Philippine focus of the curriculum aims to ease the return and reintegration of the children of professional and highly skilled OFWs on their return to the Philippines (CFO n.d). PSOs and overseas schools established by other origin countries provide an alternative to public schools in destination countries (which are economically accessible but present language difficulties to foreign children) or international schools (which may be desirable but expensive). These schools respond to the education needs of the children of migrants and allow them to maintain their connections to their home countries. At the same time, these schools reinforce the otherness and separation of the children of migrants from their host societies.

Another approach to respond to the educational needs of migrant children is the establishment of a school initiated by the migrant community. The emergence of Brazilian schools in Japan is one example. These schools cater to Brazilians (largely Japanese Brazilians) living

in Japan. The Japanese Brazilian community established these schools to ensure that children who are not proficient in Japanese language can continue their studies. The schools follow the Brazilian Ministry of Education's curriculum, which enables the children to continue their studies on their return to Brazil. Initially, the curriculum in Brazilian schools was premised on Japanese Brazilians and their children returning to Brazil. In 2013, the Brazilian National Council for Education issued Resolution CBE/CNE/1/2013, which reevaluated the operations of Brazilian schools overseas. Particularly for Brazilian schools in Japan, the resolution required that the schools provide classes in Japanese language and Japanese culture to promote the integration of students in Japanese society. Unlike their parents, who are choosing between returning to Brazil and staying in Japan, second-generation Japanese Brazilians are exploring other possibilities beyond Brazil and Japan, and, as Kanasiro (2014) reflects, "it remains to be seen how schools (Japanese and Brazilian) will react to that."

For its part, the Japanese government's educational support to immigrant children is mostly through Japanese language programs, such as supplemental Japanese classes and instructional support in the children's mother tongue. Teachers of Japanese as a second language are assigned by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to schools with many pupils of foreign nationality. In areas where there are no such teachers, local NGOs and volunteer groups organize their own support programs within the schools. MEXT also developed a curriculum of Japanese as a second language to help teachers create flexible individual curricula for each pupil, by integrating language and content support to fit the pupils' needs. The curriculum for immigrant pupils is an innovative first step toward multicultural integration (Skof and Sangawa 2013).

In most Asian countries, migrant children with legal status can access social services. In some destination countries, migrant children in an irregular situation cannot access education, while other countries are more open to them. In Sabah, East Malaysia, children of irregular Indonesian and Filipino migrants cannot attend public schools; they go instead to alternative learning centers (Allerton 2018).¹¹ In 2018, the Federal

¹⁰In the Philippines, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) conducts peer counseling for young emigrants who are 13–19 years old. The session aims to help prepare young emigrants for their new lives in a foreign country. No other country in the origin provides a similar program for young emigrants.

¹¹Similarly, children of refugees acquire education through community learning centers supported by the United Nations High

Education Ministry, under the “Undocumented Children Can Enter Schools 2019” initiative, announced that undocumented children can attend national schools, provided that one of their parents is a Malaysian citizen (*Borneo Post* 2018). In other destination countries, the child’s legal status is not a condition to attend public schools. In Japan, non-Japanese children are not required to attend school, but their parents or guardians can enroll the children in Japanese public primary and secondary schools, and they enjoy free tuition and books, regardless of their legal status (Umeda 2017).

Some 20,000 undocumented children younger than the age of 18 live in South Korea (*Korea Herald* 2019). Access to social services in South Korea by migrant children in an irregular situation depends on certain conditions. Childcare centers refuse undocumented children because the government does not provide subsidies to cover them. Article 19 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act allows undocumented children to enroll in elementary and middle school, subject to the principal’s discretion (*Korea Herald* 2019). The revised National Health Insurance Act — which allows undocumented children to join Korea’s health insurance — went into effect in January 2019. The monthly fee of USD89, however, might be prohibitive to some migrant families.

In Taiwan, the children of “runaway” migrant workers (those who have left their employers) face disheartening challenges. These children have no legal citizenship status in Taiwan, no birth registration, and no national health insurance coverage. Although women migrant workers who become pregnant cannot be fired or repatriated, employers come up with reasons for terminating a migrant worker’s contract once they find out a worker is pregnant. Many migrant workers have no other option but to run away from their employers, becoming what are known as “unaccounted-for migrant workers.” They take on illicit work to survive with their newborns. Harmony Home Association is a facility that provides a place where the children of migrant workers can stay and where mothers can visit them during their free time. The Harmony Home Association has already taken in more than a hundred children (Ting 2018).

As a destination country, Thailand receives different types of migrants: documented migrants, undocumented migrants, displaced persons, and asylum seekers. Children are part of each of these populations in Thailand. As of 2018, there were around 300,000–400,000 migrant children in Thailand (Roman and Chuanprapun 2019). Aside from efforts to regularize the status of migrant workers and their dependents, throughout the years the Thai government has taken steps to enable migrant children to access education and healthcare (*ibid.*). Through the 2005 Cabinet Resolution for Education of Unregistered Persons, the Thai government opened educational opportunities to all people, regardless of citizenship or legal status. This means that migrant children can access basic education in Thailand (i.e., from preschool to high school, a total of 15 years). In March–April 2018, a Ministerial Proclamation was passed that removes all barriers to education for migrant children in an irregular situation, such as documentation as a requirement for enrollment. Through the cooperation of the Thai government and NGOs, some 164,000 non-Thai children are enrolled in Thailand’s educational system — which comprises public schools, nonformal education centers, and migrant learning centers. At least 200,000 non-Thai children are not receiving any form of education (*ibid.*).

Thailand has also developed a policy and legislative framework to enable migrant children to access healthcare, child protection services, and birth registration. In addition, Thailand has taken important steps to end child detention, establishing standard operating procedures and setting up alternative care facilities. Nonetheless, barriers to accessing these services remain due to language, negative attitudes and misunderstandings about policies among officials, lack of capacity for service delivery, and the reluctance of migrants (particularly those in irregular situations) to avail themselves of these services (*ibid.*).

Support for Multicultural Children

Marriage migration played an important role in South Korea’s policy shift toward multiculturalism. The establishment of more than 200 Multicultural Family Support Centers throughout the country offers a range of services from language training to employment assistance and family counseling (Yang 2011; Danuri 2018). The Rainbow Youth Center focuses on programs for children and

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Yet, out of the 23,823 school-age children, only 30 percent are enrolled in these centers (UNHCR n.d.).

youth (ages 9–25) from multicultural backgrounds (Danuri 2018).

Multiculturalism in the Korean context is not quite the same as its predecessors because the Korean style, as observers noted, is closer to the assimilation model. Considering Korea's recent experience as a country of immigration, however, the departure from the long-held view of Korea as a homogeneous society toward a more diverse society is remarkable (Lim 2017). Children from multicultural families are navigating a society in transition. The life stories shared by such children hint at the different impacts of Korea's multicultural policies on them: some are appreciative of these programs, but others do not like being singled out and would rather be considered equal to other Koreans (Asis and Liao 2017).

In Japan, a comprehensive policy framework addressing multicultural families, particularly children, is not in place, and instead, the role of local governments and NGOs comes to the fore. In Japan, the Hamamatsu City government is an excellent example of a local government that collaborates with migrants' associations and NGOs not only in responding to the challenges of international migration but also in recognizing the benefits of its multicultural context (Asis and Liao 2017).

In Taiwan, local government and national-level policies offer initiatives to support multicultural families. The Taipei City Government's Division of Welfare Services for Women and Child Care Centers, for example, has support service centers and conducts outreach and visits to such families (Department of Social Welfare, Taipei City Government 2019). At the national level, the National Migration Agency has multilingual personnel who speak Vietnamese, Thai, and Bahasa Indonesia, and it offers free Chinese-language classes to immigrants in locations throughout Taiwan (Fulco 2018).

Various NGOs provide advice, parent and child counseling, financial assistance, language classes, and life adjustment counseling. Most NGOs are focused on the empowerment of women and foreign spouses. Those that focus on the promotion of children's welfare include the National Living Rebuilt Association, Pearl S Buck Foundation, Good Shepherd Sisters Foundation, and Taiwan Foundation for Children and Families (Tsai and Hsiao 2006). During the past 15 years, many NGOs have emerged to cater to the needs of migrants.

A bright spot on the horizon is the promotion of Southeast Asian languages in the curriculum in Taiwan. It started with the efforts of the principal and some teachers of Dong An Elementary School in Taoyuan City in introducing the teaching of Vietnamese and Bahasa Indonesia (Hsu, Chi-chung, and Jo-yao 2019). This local initiative became a national program when the Ministry of Education in June 2019 approved the option for elementary students to study one of seven Southeast Asian languages — Vietnamese, Indonesian, Thai, Burmese, Cambodian, Malay, and Filipino — in addition to Taiwan's existing Minnan and Hakka dialects and indigenous languages (Hsu, Chi-chung, and Jo-yao 2019; Lin and Chung 2019). This option was implemented beginning in August 2019, making Taiwan “the first nation to incorporate multiple Southeast Asian languages into official curricula and develop official textbooks for them,” according to K–12 Education Administration Director-General Peng Fu-yuan. Deputy Minister of Education Fan Sun-lu believes that learning Southeast Asian languages will familiarize students with the concept of a multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural society (Lin and Chung 2019).

When international marriages end in separation or divorce, children are affected by family dissolution. The rupture may lead to the return of the children and/or the foreign spouse to the spouse's home country, to back-and-forth migration of the children, to child custody disputes, or to fathers abandoning their children. When the child's parents have not married, seeking child support is complicated by having to track down the father, securing paternal recognition (which may require a DNA test), working out child support, and the child acquiring the father's nationality. These issues beset Japanese Filipino children or Korean Filipino children born to unstable families and relationships, which can arise from international marriages, entertainer migration (i.e., the migration of mostly women who are recruited to work as singers or dancers but who end up working as hostesses in clubs), tourism, or the movement of people that accompanies investments (e.g., Japanese or Korean investors coming to the Philippines).

The plight of Japanese Filipino children living in the Philippines came to public attention during the period of significant entertainer migration from the Philippines to Japan. The children experienced difficulties because they were not recognized or were abandoned by their

Japanese fathers. Many children were raised singly by their mothers, and those who returned to the Philippines fell into poverty. NGOs in Japan and the Philippines and transnational activism resulted in actions that led to policy changes, public awareness and education initiatives, and support programs for Japanese Filipino children.¹² The Citizen's Network for Japanese Filipino Children in Japan worked with partner NGOs in the Philippines, such as Batis Women, the Development Action for Women Network, and Maligaya House, to help migrant women in Japan address work problems and abusive working conditions. These entities also provided psychosocial support to returnees who had been traumatized by their experience. In particular, they helped returnees find alternatives to migration. Later, these NGOs also turned their attention to addressing the children's rights and welfare.¹³ These groups carried out lobbying, actions, and services in Japan and the Philippines. In the 2000s, the spotlight turned to Korean Filipino children, or Kopinos, which specifically refers to children of Korean and Filipino parentage living in the Philippines. Typically in these families, the Korean father came to the Philippines as a tourist, student, or businessman, and the children were born and remain in the Philippines. The population of Korean Filipino children is 10,000 by one estimate (Asis 2018, 4), compared to an estimated 100,000 Japanese Filipino children (Hara 2018, 158). Neither estimate is precise, however. The experience of NGOs in advocating for policies and programs to support Japanese Filipino children can be a point of reference for advocacy for Korean Filipino children (Asis 2018).

¹²In December 2008, Japan amended Article 3 of its Nationality Act. Previously, Article 3 states that a child can obtain Japanese nationality if the mother or father is a Japanese national at the time of the child's birth (Law No. 147 of 1950, as amended, art. 2, item 1). A child born outside of marriage to a Japanese father and a foreign mother cannot obtain Japanese nationality by birth, unless the father legally recognizes the child before the birth. As amended, Article 3 provides that if the parents marry before the child reaches 20 years of age, Japanese nationality is given to the child (Umeda 2008). This legal victory was the product of sustained advocacy.

¹³For details, see the Enable Kids Project, under "Documents and Profiles of Programs and Services in the Philippines, Japan and South Korea": <https://enablekidsproject.wordpress.com/documents-and-profiles-of-programs-and-services/>.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the course of sustained international migration in the region throughout the last four decades, countries in East, South, and Southeast Asia have developed laws, institutions, policies, and programs to govern the multifaceted aspects of the phenomenon. For the most part, these policies and programs have adults in mind as the target or intended population of interest. Children are also migration actors, however, whose perspectives, concerns, and interests need to be considered in research, policy making, and advocacy.

As this mapping exercise illustrates, international migration presents challenges for children. In migrant origin countries, concerns about the left-behind children of migrant workers have taken center stage in public debates about international migration. On one hand, the economic benefits of temporary labor migration for families are widely recognized. On the other hand, the separation of migrant workers from their families is perceived to cause problems for family relationships. Parental migration is feared to lead to a care crisis, particularly for young children, which could affect children's well-being, physical health, emotional health, and schooling. Parental absence due to migration raises worries over children becoming delinquent and engaging in risky practices. Public opinion tends to focus on the perceived social costs of migration, rather than whatever material benefits migration may bring to migrants and their families. Research-based evidence, however, suggests a more nuanced picture of the various outcomes of international migration. In Asia, the care of young children continues to be a family responsibility, and family is viewed as a safety net that fosters resilience. The initiatives developed by government agencies and NGOs in the Philippines provide additional support that helps migrants and families cope with the challenges of migration.

In destination countries, migrant and refugee children and children in multicultural families face issues of social exclusion arising from their status as migrants. The importance of language support programs to migrant and multicultural children cannot be overemphasized, because language is critical to the education experience, daily life, and integration of these children. Children in an irregular situation, including stateless children, often cannot access education, healthcare,

protection, and other social services. Withholding these services from children renders them vulnerable to a future of invisibility and marginalization. Thailand's education policy, which provides basic education to all children in the country regardless of legal status, should be considered a best practice that other countries in the region should emulate. Thailand has also taken important steps to include the children of migrants in healthcare and birth registration and to explore alternatives to the detention of children. All of these steps conform to the principles and recommendations of the GCM and GCR.

To date, the existing policies and good practices that promote the welfare of children affected by international migration are more the exceptions rather than the norm. Universal birth registration and access to education, healthcare, protective services, and social services are fundamental to the social inclusion and well-being of left-behind children, migrant and refugee children, and children in multicultural families. By mainstreaming children's specific needs in their programs of action, the GCM and GCR chart the way toward socially inclusive societies. In committing to the best interests of all children, countries can also ensure a more sustainable future.

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