International migration flows have increased substantially over the past decades. Today, three percent of the world population resides in a country other than where they were born.[i] As a result, international migration and its impact in receiving and sending societies are receiving unprecedented attention at the policy level.

While much work has been done to ascertain the consequences of international migration on receiving societies, little attention has been paid to assessing its impact on sending countries and specifically on the left behind (Battistella & Gastardo-Conaco 1998, Cortes 2006, Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People-CBCP /Apostleship of the Sea-Manila, Scalabrini Migration Center, & Overseas Workers Welfare Administration 2004, Yeoh & Lam 2006). The main reason for the lack of research in this area is the scarcity of reliable national-level data on the incidence and magnitude of international migration (of adults or children) and on those left behind. Estimating these numbers has been extremely difficult due to a range of methodological problems, such as (Whitehead & Hashim 2005):

- Increasing population mobility complicates the estimation of the number of international migrants;
- There is no standardized way by which countries measure migration rates which makes comparisons difficult;
- Undocumented migration creates new measurement challenges;
- Most official and non-official statistics do not disaggregate migratory flows by age and gender, gender, education and skills;
- There is a lack of consensus on the terms and the implementation of quantitative approaches to measure the impacts of migration.

There are several data sources that may be used to estimate international migration flows and the number of the left behind. However, most of these data banks focus on particular areas of concern (Black 2004) or are difficult to compare due to the use of different categories and formats (DESA 2002).

At national level, independent studies show:

- In the Philippines, between 8.8 and 9 million children, or around 27% of the total youth population, are separated from one or both parents *(Kakammpi, 2005)*
- In Ecuador, about 300,000 children and adolescents have been left-behind by one or both migrating parents since 2000 *(UNICEF Ecuador, 2006)*
- In Moldova, this number amount to 31% of all children aged 0-14, a total of approximately 220,000 *(UNICEF Moldova, 2006)*
- In 2002, 13% of Mexican and almost 22% of Salvadoran immigrants living in the US had left their children behind in their home countries *(Cortina & de la Garza, 2004)*

These figures have a limited scope and do not allow for general conclusions.

This lack of comparable data hinders effective public policy initiatives that address the impacts of migration (Bilsborrow et.al. 1997). There is thus a growing interest in quantifying the volume of international migration flows and assessing their economic and social implications, especially in countries of origin.

More research and comparable global data on the effects of migration is needed in order to make children more visible in migration debates and policies. Successful policies would also require quantitative and qualitative surveys on the respect of human rights of children affected by migration (including social protection).

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[i] According to the United Nations Population Division, the number of migrants in the world has more than doubled since 1975, with most living in Europe (56 million), Asia (50 million), and North America (41 million). See DESA (2003) for further information on world migration.