



Children of seasonal migrant workers

EARLY CHILDHOOD MATTERS

A horizontal line of 28 small geometric shapes, including squares and diamonds, in various shades of gray, positioned directly below the title.

Early Childhood Matters is a journal about early childhood. It looks at specific issues regarding the development of young children, in particular from a psychosocial perspective. It is published twice per year by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The views expressed in *Early Childhood Matters* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Work featured is not necessarily funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

© Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2013

Reproduction of articles by photocopying or electronic means for non-commercial purposes is permitted. However, it is requested that the author, *Early Childhood Matters* and Bernard van Leer Foundation are cited as the source of the information. Permission must be obtained to use photos.

ISSN 1387-9553

Cover: Seasonal migrant workers camp in Konya, Turkey

Photo: Selim Iltus/Bernard van Leer Foundation

Early Childhood Matters is also published in Spanish:

Espacio para la Infancia (ISSN 1566-6476). Both publications are available electronically on **earlychildhoodmagazine.org** and single hard copies can be requested free of charge.

Bernard van Leer Foundation

PO Box 82334

2508 EH The Hague, The Netherlands

Tel: +31 (0)70 331 2200

www.bernardvanleer.org

Series editor Teresa Moreno

Consultant editor Andrew Wright

Text edited by Margaret Mellor

Design Homemade Cookies (cookies.nl)

Contents

- 5 Realities of life for children of seasonal migrant workers
Selim Ilus
- 8 An early childhood programme tailored to migrant and seasonal farmworkers' children
Guadalupe Cuesta and Kevin Skolnik
- 12 Health risks for children of seasonal migrant agricultural workers
Martin Donohoe
- 14 Information map: Living conditions and young children
- 16 Seasonal agricultural migration in Turkey and young children
Özsel Belevi
- 20 Seasonal migrants' realities: a study of 686 Turkish households
Müge Artar
- 23 The children of seasonal migrants in Turkey are still vulnerable
Mehmet Ülger and Astrid van Unen
- 27 A healthy and safe environment for young migrants at urban Indian worksites
Umi Daniel
- 31 The *Humara Bachpan* campaign: a success for seasonal migrant children in Odisha
Jyoti Prakash Brahma
- 35 Meeting migrant families' needs through on-site crèches
Mridula Bajaj and Mayanka Gupta
- 39 Political action for the children of seasonal migrant farm labourers in Mexico
Patricia Urbieto and Claudia Cabrera
- 43 'Families must be supported': a view from the private sector
Dora Isabel Ochoa Aguilar
- 47 Children of seasonal agricultural migrant workers: an African perspective
Moussa Harouna Sambo
- 49 Cash transfers, information, and seasonal migration
Karen Macours



Often, migrant workers and their families live in makeshift tents or shacks without water, sanitation, health services or play areas.
Photo • Courtesy U-producties

'The Bernard van Leer Foundation's interest in the children of seasonal migrant workers is inspired by our strategic goal to improve children's health by improving their living conditions.'

Realities of life for children of seasonal migrant workers

Selim Iltus, Research and Evaluation Officer, Bernard van Leer Foundation

Selim Iltus, the Bernard van Leer Foundation's Research and Evaluation Officer, introduces the articles in this edition of *Early Childhood Matters* and explains why children of seasonal migrant workers face particular challenges that require our special attention.

This issue of *Early Childhood Matters* focuses on an almost invisible population. Most of us are surprised to learn how many people frequently migrate in search of work. For example, it is estimated that there are 5 million migrant workers in the USA, and in India their numbers reach hundreds of millions.

How is it possible for such a large group to remain invisible? Systems for collecting data and information tend to focus on settled populations and overlook those who move around a lot. Seasonal migrant workers keep moving from one location to another, typically not staying long enough to get onto the radar of local governments. This is one of the biggest challenges for researchers and government authorities who try to map the situation of these workers so that they can provide the right level of services. Many of the articles in this issue highlight how seasonal migrant workers rarely get the basic services that are critical for them and their children.

Even if local government and municipal entities could accurately track migrants and their needs, meeting those needs requires coordination among many different agencies: health, education, water, sanitation, housing, and day care, among others. Such coordinated efforts are extremely difficult.

A further problem is that people who travel frequently find it inherently more difficult to organise themselves. There is therefore a lack of NGOs seeking to focus the attention of the public and policymakers on seasonal migrants' needs.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation's interest in the children of seasonal migrant workers is inspired by our strategic goal to improve children's health by improving their living conditions. While they are away from their

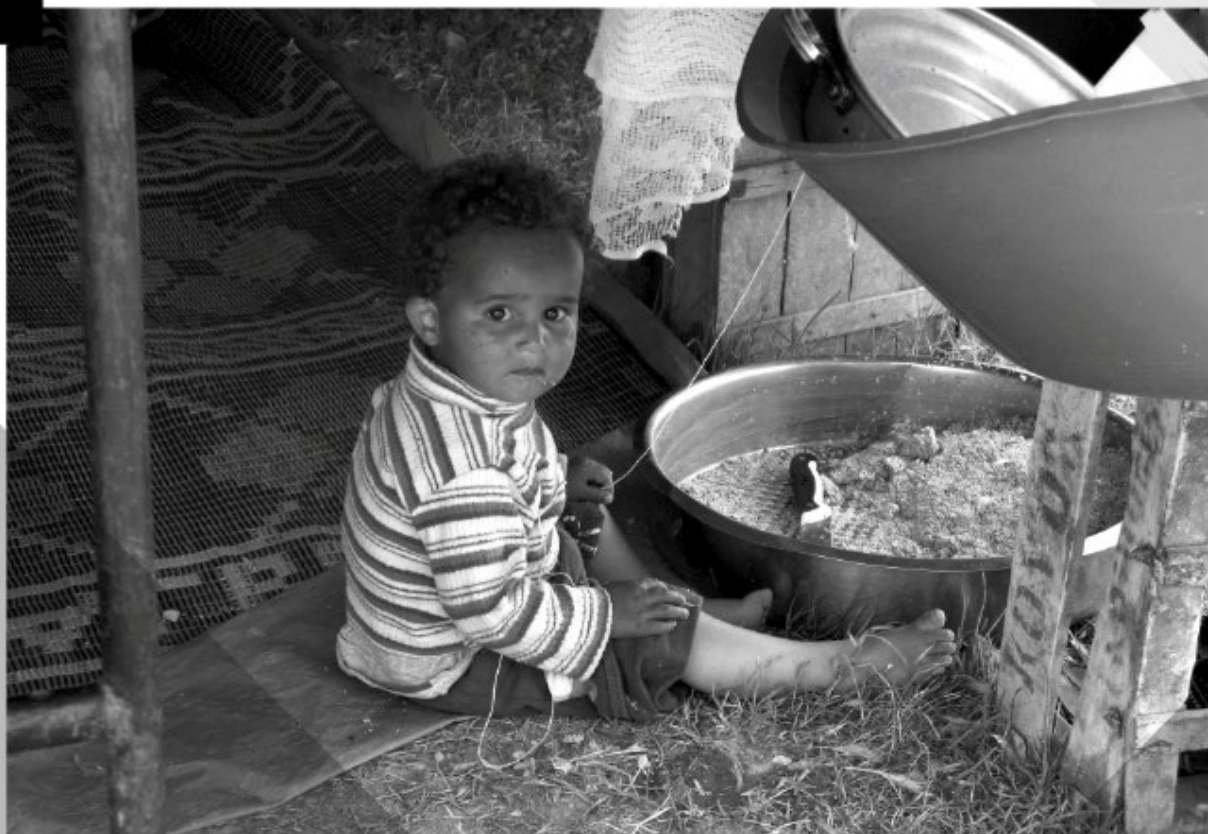
homes, migrant workers and their families typically live in horrible conditions on or near the sites where they are working. As documented by articles in this issue, often they live in makeshift tents or shacks without water, sanitation, health services or play areas.

While these conditions are deplorable for all age groups, the most vulnerable are young children. Still too young to go to the fields to work with their parents, they are often abandoned in the camps for long hours, either alone or under the inadequate supervision of only very slightly older siblings. During a visit to a camp in Turkey, I witnessed a very young child sitting alone in an empty tent, playing with a large, sharp knife.

A careful reader of the articles in this issue will immediately recognise that the problems facing the migrant workers, and the consequences for their young children, transcend national boundaries. They are reflected in detail in articles including those by Müge Artar (Turkey), Patricia Urbieta and Claudia Cabrera (Mexico), Umi Daniel (India) and Martin Donohoe (USA). In addition, Moussa Harouna Sambo provides an African perspective, highlighting the issue of fathers leaving their families to find work and sometimes never returning.

This issue also includes some very creative and promising interventions designed to improve the lives of the children for migrant workers. The Hyderabad Model in India, described in the article by Umi Daniel, tries to solve the shelter issue by designing and providing improved housing to the families. He also describes how this intervention has provided safe play spaces for children who previously were afraid to go outside because of the risks of accidents or abuse.

Jyoti Prakash Brahma presents another innovative programme, also from India, showing how the poor nutritional status of children can be improved by providing meals through local ICDS centres. The programme is trying to strengthen this approach through extensive lobbying and by supporting the development of guidelines.



“During a visit to a camp in Turkey, I witnessed a very young child sitting alone in an empty tent, playing with a large, sharp knife.”
 Photo • Selim Illus

The article by Guadalupe Cuesta and Kevin Skolnik explains the Migrant Seasonal Headstart programme in the USA, which addresses the problem of severe lack of childcare services for migrant families. The strength of the programme comes from its sensitivity towards needs and living patterns of the families it is serving – for example, by keeping the service hours extremely long (5 a.m. to 7 p.m., 6 days a week) and carefully considering the cultural relevance of the programme for the people it serves. This can serve as a model for many new programmes that are being designed for seasonal migrants in other countries.

Do we have hard evidence showing that these types of interventions do work? Articles from India (by Mridula Bajaj and Mayanka Gupta) and Nicaragua (by Karen Macours) not only describe effective interventions,

but also provide strong evidence about their positive impacts on children. In India, day care and educational services delivered by Mobile Crèches resulted in a strong improvement in child indicators. For example, after 200 days of exposure, children scored at 91% in terms of their cognitive skills compared to 67% for the control group, who had fewer than 100 days of exposure. Similar improvements were also recorded in children’s language, sensory-motor and social-emotional skills. In Nicaragua, the intervention included a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme, where the condition was participation in educational programmes on nutrition and health. Preliminary findings indicate that simply providing extra cash to families is not enough, and providing information can be even more effective.

There is definitely more research needed in this area, since the findings can have significant implications for developing policy.

The main requirement with all these solutions and programmes is to spread them so that they can reach all the seasonal worker families who need them. This will be an immense task, requiring not only political commitment and funding, but also coordination among ministries, municipalities and civil service organisations.

This edition of *Early Childhood Matters* gives strong clues about what kind of action is needed. In her article from Turkey, Özsel Belevi recommends three levels of action: the need to address the root cause of seasonal migration; the need to improve the legal framework and develop policies; and the need to improve living conditions and services to seasonal migrants through projects carried out at the local level.

The first issue should not be overlooked, as migrant workers travel to distant lands to find work only because they lack job opportunities in or near their home locations. Unless the availability of local jobs increases, their numbers will not diminish. Furthermore, better economic opportunities near migrants' home towns is vital to give the next generation alternative opportunities to earn a living. Often, children of seasonal migrant workers slip into the same difficult and impoverished lifestyle because they have no other options, starting to work – at an age that may defy laws on child labour – when they should still be completing their education.

It is also important to bring to the attention of decision makers and the public the lack of a legal framework in many countries to protect the rights of migrant workers and their children: minimum wage regulations, unemployment insurance, health care and so forth. Even where the policies exist, in many cases they are not being fully implemented.

Effective campaigns can and should include striking messages and tools. In their article, Mehmet Ülger and Astrid van Unen give an excellent example of this by showing how a well-made short documentary film in Turkey on this issue generated intense discussion even outside the country, and is likely to lead to positive action.

Ülger and van Unen's article also draws attention to the importance of considering all beneficiaries from the work of seasonal migrant workers, including landowners, agricultural agents, who match seasonal workers with landowners, companies which buy and sell the products generated by the migrant workers – including well-known multinationals – and, ultimately, consumers.

Solutions should seek to engage the active participation of the private sector. A model for how socially responsible companies can support the migrant workers they employ – and their families – is provided by the Mexican tomato-growing enterprise Agrícola BelHer. The interview with their human resources manager, Dora Isabel Ochoa Aguilar, highlights practices which we would encourage all employers of seasonal migrant workers to emulate to engage the active participation of the private sector.

An early childhood programme tailored to migrant and seasonal farmworkers' children

Guadalupe Cuesta, Director, National Migrant/Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Office, and Kevin Skolnik, Program Officer, National Migrant/Seasonal Head Start, Washington DC, USA



In addition to transportation, access to health care is difficult for migrant farmworkers and their families. Photo • Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs. Courtesy of Academy for Educational Development

In the United States, the Migrant/Seasonal Head Start programme (MSHS) seeks to ensure that the children of seasonal migrant farmworkers do not miss out on the early childhood services. This article describes how MSHS, set up in 1969, provides essential support such as free childcare for 10–12 hours a day, and transporting children to preschool services and health care facilities.

I was on the phone with my 77-year-old mother. She mentioned that she had been thinking of the years when we migrated to the Northern States. We were migrant farm workers and traveled throughout the Midwestern states following the harvest of crops. Mother mentioned a certain year in Michigan when during the cherry harvest the only place available to live was a tent located at the edge of the orchard. The dirt had been covered with bricks and stones to make a floor but even so when it rained the water leaked into the tent and the 'floor' became a muddy mess. She asked me,

'How did we put up with living like that?' I replied that I didn't know. As a child it did not occur to me to think that things should not be so.

This is a quote from Elida Perez Knapp, recalling her childhood, when Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programmes did not exist. MSHS was created as a result of fierce advocacy and lobbying for migrant farmworker rights by leaders and organisations such as Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Edward R. Murrow, and the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), to name a few. In response to the increased awareness of the plight of the migrant farmworker that these and others worked for many years to bring about, the federal government created the MSHS programme in 1969 to address the unique needs of migrant farmworker families (Martinez and Rodriguez Jr, 2013).²

For families like Elida's, earning a livelihood was difficult. The challenges of piecing together temporary agricultural work along thousand-mile migrant streams, however, still exist. As Elida says:

Migrant families today face many of the same issues as they travel in search of work. Families deal with substandard housing, low wages and difficulty finding jobs. Fortunately, thanks to programmes and services like Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, families now have a way to access the necessary resources to help make their journeys easier. Organisations at the local, state and national level are constantly networking and collaborating with each other, and advocating on behalf of migrant families in an effort to ensure that their needs are not forgotten. As a result, migrant families have a voice via staff/programmes who work passionately advocating on behalf of children living in poverty.

This article explores how MSHS helps migrant families to meet the challenges they face in bringing up their young children.

The challenges of migrant and seasonal farmworker families

Due to the temporary nature of work, being available only during harvest season, families must continuously and frequently uproot. Work opportunities often involve 10- to 12-hour work days of strenuous labour up to 6 days a week (Martinez and Rodriguez Jr, 2013).

In particular, some of the biggest challenges that MSHS was designed to address are transportation, health care, childcare, language, cultural differences, and access to quality early childhood education. Transportation from one work site to the next is difficult. A family must pack everything they own into one vehicle, and what they have must sustain them throughout their migration. Each migration may last 8 to 10 months. In addition, family members are likely to find employment in different fields, so transporting all family members to work using a shared vehicle is an issue. Doctor's appointments or school events may be missed due to lack of available transport.

In addition to transportation, access to health care is difficult for migrant farmworkers and their families.

Many families qualify for Medicaid, but it is not portable from one state to the next, so they are not covered as they travel and have to continually reapply. Each time a family reapplies, delays in processing leave parents and children without critical coverage. Some seasonal and migrant farmworker families do not have access to any health insurance. For these families, the price of fee-for-service health care is prohibitively high, especially for preventive care. Health care is critical for this population, due mainly to the high-risk environment in which they work, involving such factors as hard physical labour and exposure to toxic pesticides.

However, the most perilous situations occur when families cannot find childcare. Childcare is essential to the survival of the farmworker family. With no reliable source of childcare, families are forced to bring their children into the fields during the lengthy work day, exposing the children to poisonous chemicals and dangerous farming equipment. If families do not bring their children into the fields, they may be forced to leave them with an older sibling who may not be mature or knowledgeable enough to care for young children. The final option is that families leave their children with someone that they don't know well. Each of these choices is a potentially dangerous childcare situation.

Other key difficulties that migrant and seasonal farmworker families encounter are language and cultural barriers. These barriers make it difficult for families to interact with anyone outside of their insular communities. A vast majority of these families speak Spanish as their primary language. In addition, language and cultural barriers keep families from accessing much-needed community resources. Isolation and limited resources make survival and success difficult to attain.

One final major challenge that migrant and seasonal farmworkers face is gaining access to quality early childhood education. Migrant farmworker families place a high value on education. It is viewed as a path to a better quality of life and an opportunity for children to gain better employment than that of their farmworker

parents. Like all parents, migrant and seasonal farmworkers want their children to get a head start on their education in order to achieve their full potential and aspirations.

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start: a tailored solution

The Migrant and Seasonal Head Start model has helped migrant and seasonal farmworker families overcome these myriad challenges. MSHS was adapted from the Head Start model:

Head Start was launched in 1965 as a part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. The goal of Head Start was to create a child development programme that could reach preschool children in low-income families in an effort to help break the cycle of poverty by providing early childhood education and comprehensive social services designed to meet the emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs of young children and their families.

(Martinez and Rodriguez Jr, 2013)

MSHS is tailored to address challenges that migrant farmworkers face. For instance, MSHS addresses the issue of transportation. MSHS is one of the few early childhood education programmes that transports children to and from MSHS preschool centres. Because migrant and seasonal farmworker parents are working during the day, MSHS programmes also provide transport for children to required medical, dental, or other needed services. Parents can attend to their work in the knowledge that their child will visit the doctor or dentist and receive the care they need.

MSHS leads the way in health care by assisting families in getting the medical attention they need. To bridge the gap, MSHS programmes utilise a collaborative relationship with federally funded health centres. Partnering with health centres allows for expedited delivery of services for families during the short window of time they are at a site. By collaborating, MSHS programmes and health centres also maximise resources and reduce duplication of services. Health centres are located throughout the country. By tapping into this national network of health centres, MSHS families and children have access to a continuity of services that

was previously unattainable as they travel across the country.

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start uniquely addresses the issue of childcare for farmworker families by providing free childcare to all qualifying families. Also, MSHS programmes are open 10–12 hours per day when needed. Programmes may open as early as 5 in the morning and stay open as late as 7 in the evening to allow parents to work the long hours mandated by agricultural work. Furthermore, programmes may operate up to 6 days per week if needed. This also helps ensure that parents feel secure in the knowledge that their children are safe during the time they are at work.

'Some of the biggest challenges that MSHS was designed to address are transportation, healthcare, childcare, language, cultural differences, and access to quality early childhood education.'

Additionally, MSHS is mandated by law to address the issue of language and culture in the services it provides to children and families:

Effective Head Start programming requires understanding, respect, and responsiveness to the cultures of all people, but particularly to those of enrolled children and families.
(Early Head Start National Resource Center, 2008)

Early childhood services (assessments, instructional aids, teaching) are delivered with the child's primary language and culture in mind. This is also true for services to MSHS parents (parent education, parent engagement activities, translation services, interpretation, etc.). Programmes are responsive to the language and culture of children and parents alike.

In response to the final challenge outlined above, Head Start helps children acquire the skills, knowledge and attitudes to succeed in school and life.

The Head Start Approach to School Readiness means that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children. ... Head Start often has led the early childhood field with a strong, clear, and comprehensive focus on all aspects of healthy development, including physical, cognitive, social and emotional development, all of which are essential to children getting ready for school.

(Office of Head Start, 2011, online)

MSHS: a model that works

Families enrolled in MSHS value and appreciate the philosophy of Head Start. The words of LeAnn, a MSHS parent, are representative:

My son, Nicholas, attended preschool at a Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programme in Texas. This year will be his last year before he moves onto Kindergarten. I know that with all of the positive enrichment he has experienced here at the Migrant & Seasonal Head Start he will excel in school. I am so proud that my son attends Texas Migrant Council (TMC). The education he is receiving and the assistance TMC provides to families and children is outstanding! I was so impressed with the programme, I became motivated and wanted to be involved. I want what every parent wants for their children. An excellent start in education so our children may achieve their dreams and become whatever they wish in life! With my son's great start at TMC he is on the path to success!

For families who travel throughout the country following the migrant stream to harvest the food that feeds America, the MSHS model works. This is due to continuous federal funding, continued advocacy and lobbying for farmworker rights, and the MSHS programme's commitment to adapting to the needs of migrant farmworkers as their work in agriculture evolves.

Thanks to these efforts, there is a vast difference between the feelings expressed by Elida Perez-Knapp, a migrant farmworker child from many years ago, and that of LeAnn's recent experience as a migrant farmworker. Migrant and seasonal farmworker families now receive the resources they need to turn their challenges into successes via the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start model. As Elida concludes:

I had no words of comfort for my mother's pain of so long ago, but what I did respond was to let her know how much things have changed. I let her know that programmes such as Migrant and Seasonal Head Start support families, and that it is no longer acceptable to have to live at the edge of a cherry orchard in a tent with a dirt floor covered in bricks and stones. Families no longer have to put up with living like that.

References

- Early Head Start National Resource Center. (2008). *Revisiting and Updating the Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Ages Birth to Five*, Information memorandum: Multicultural principles for Head Start programs Log No. ACYL-IM-91-03. Washington, DC: Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services.
- Martinez, J.E. and Rodriguez Jr., C. (2013). *Migrant and Seasonal Head Start: A program that works*. Washington, DC: National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association.
- Office of Head Start. (2011, online). *Head Start Approach to School Readiness*. Available at: http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/sr/approach/pdf/OHSApproach-to-School-Readiness_complete.pdf: http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/sr/approach/pdf/OHSApproach-to-School-Readiness_complete.pdf (accessed September 2013)

Notes

- The authors can be contacted as follows:
Guadalupe Cuesta, Director, National Migrant/Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Office, Head Start Region XI & XII, T/TA Collaboration Center, Early Care and Education, US Education and Workforce Development. O: 202.884.8595 | F: 202.884.8732 | E: gcuesta@fhi360.org | www.fhi360.org
Kevin Skolnik, Program Officer, National Migrant/Seasonal Head Start and National American Indian/Alaska Native Collaboration Offices, Head Start Regions XI & XII, Early Care and Education, US Education and Workforce Development. O: 202.464.3788 | F: 202.884.8732 | E: kskolnik@fhi360.org | www.fhi360.org
- For further detail on the history of seasonal and migrant farmworkers in the USA, see *About America's Farmworkers – History* on the website of the National Center for Farmworker Health: <http://www.ncfh.org/?pid=4&page=2> (accessed September 2013).

Health risks for children of seasonal migrant agricultural workers

Martin Donohoe, Adjunct Associate Professor, School of Community Health, Portland State University, Oregon, USA¹



Young children of seasonal migrant agricultural workers are exposed to a variety of health hazards as they are often living in poor temporary housing, close to the fields in which their parents are working. Photo • Courtesy U-products

Often living in poor temporary housing, close to the fields in which their parents are working, young children of seasonal migrant agricultural workers are exposed to a variety of health hazards. Children in general are more vulnerable to communicable and respiratory diseases and may also be more affected than adults by exposure to pesticides, given that they have a higher ratio of surface area to bodyweight, greater circulatory flow rates and less mature immune systems (Bearer, 1995). This article highlights the main health hazards faced by seasonal migrant agricultural workers and their children.

Chemical and pesticide-related illnesses

In the absence of proper laundry facilities, clothing contaminated with pesticides may be washed in the same sink in which food is prepared, or in the bathtub

in which children are bathed. Children may play in fields treated with pesticides. And if seasonal migrants' housing camps are located next to pesticide-treated fields, there may also be persistent pesticide exposure via wind drift. Exposure to organophosphates, the basis of many pesticides, can result in symptoms including blurred vision, nausea, vomiting, cramps, low blood pressure, and heart and lung problems. In severe cases the effects can be fatal. Long-term exposure can cause neurological problems (Rosenstock *et al.*, 1991; von Essen and McCurdy, 1998).

Infectious disease

Living conditions may be overcrowded, with poor ventilation, lack of safe drinking water, and rubbish heaps and stagnant water allowing rodents and insects to breed. Migrant workers are consequently at

significantly increased risk of contracting a variety of viral, bacterial, fungal and parasitic infections (von Essen and Donham, 1997; Gwyther and Jenkins, 1998; Sandhaus, 1998).

Dermatitis

Skin disorders can be caused by exposure to pesticides, fertilisers, latex, chemicals, and allergenic plants or crops.

Respiratory conditions

These can be caused by exposure to dusts, gases, herbicides, fertilisers, solvents, fuels and fumes (Schenker, 1996).

Cancer

Migrant workers are exposed to a wide variety of carcinogens, including pesticides, solvents, oils, fumes, and ultraviolet radiation from chronic sun exposure. Children exposed to pesticides seem to show higher relative risks than adults of developing many of these cancers (Zahn and Ward, 1998).

Abuse and mental ill-health

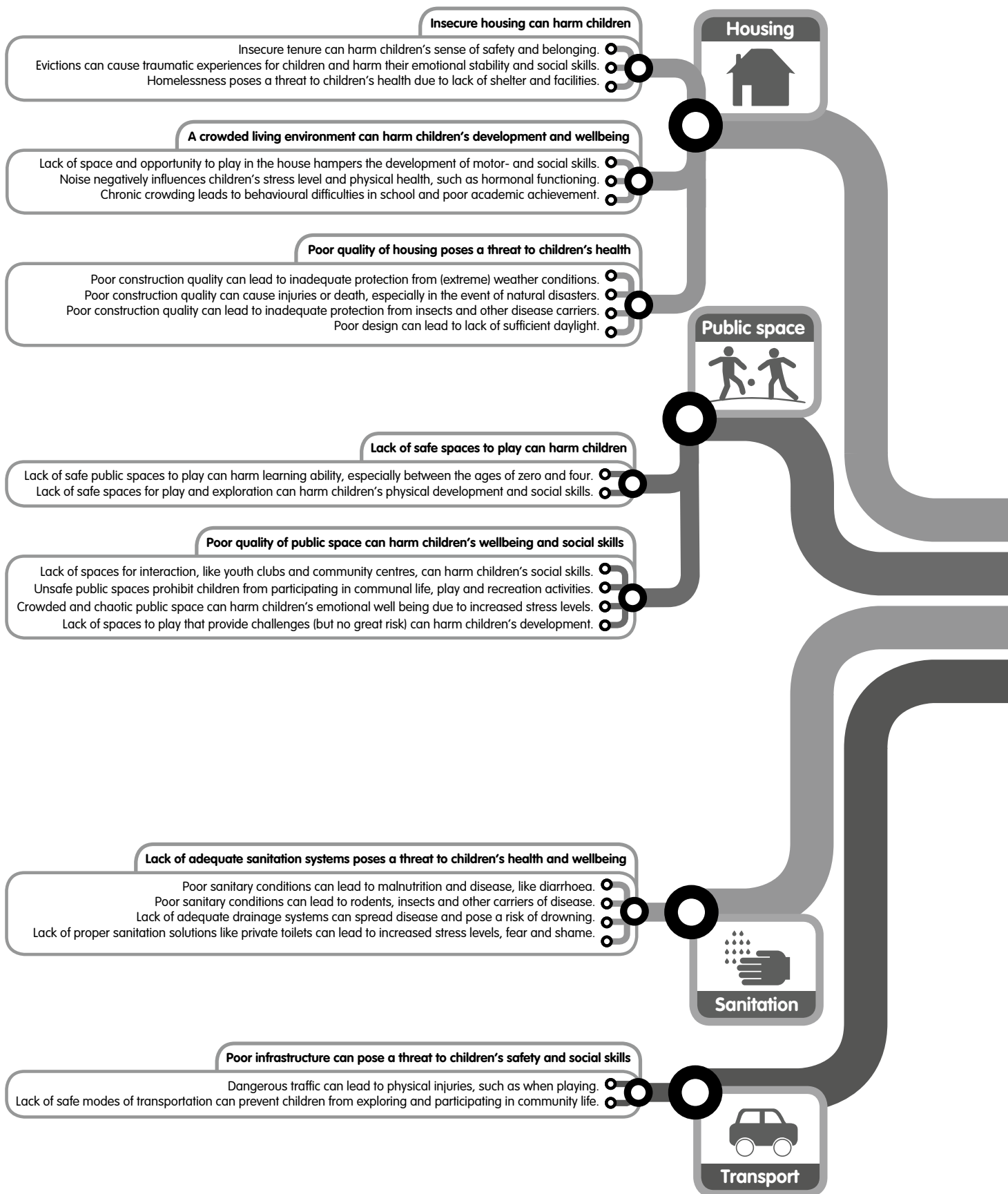
In addition to the insecure and low-paid nature of the work, seasonal migrant workers are often socially and geographically isolated. Studies in the USA show that children of migrant workers are six times more likely than average to be mistreated (Villajero and Baron, 1999). Frequent moves, interrupted schooling and demeaning racial epithets are features of the lives of many migrant workers' children, which can impact on their mental health.

References

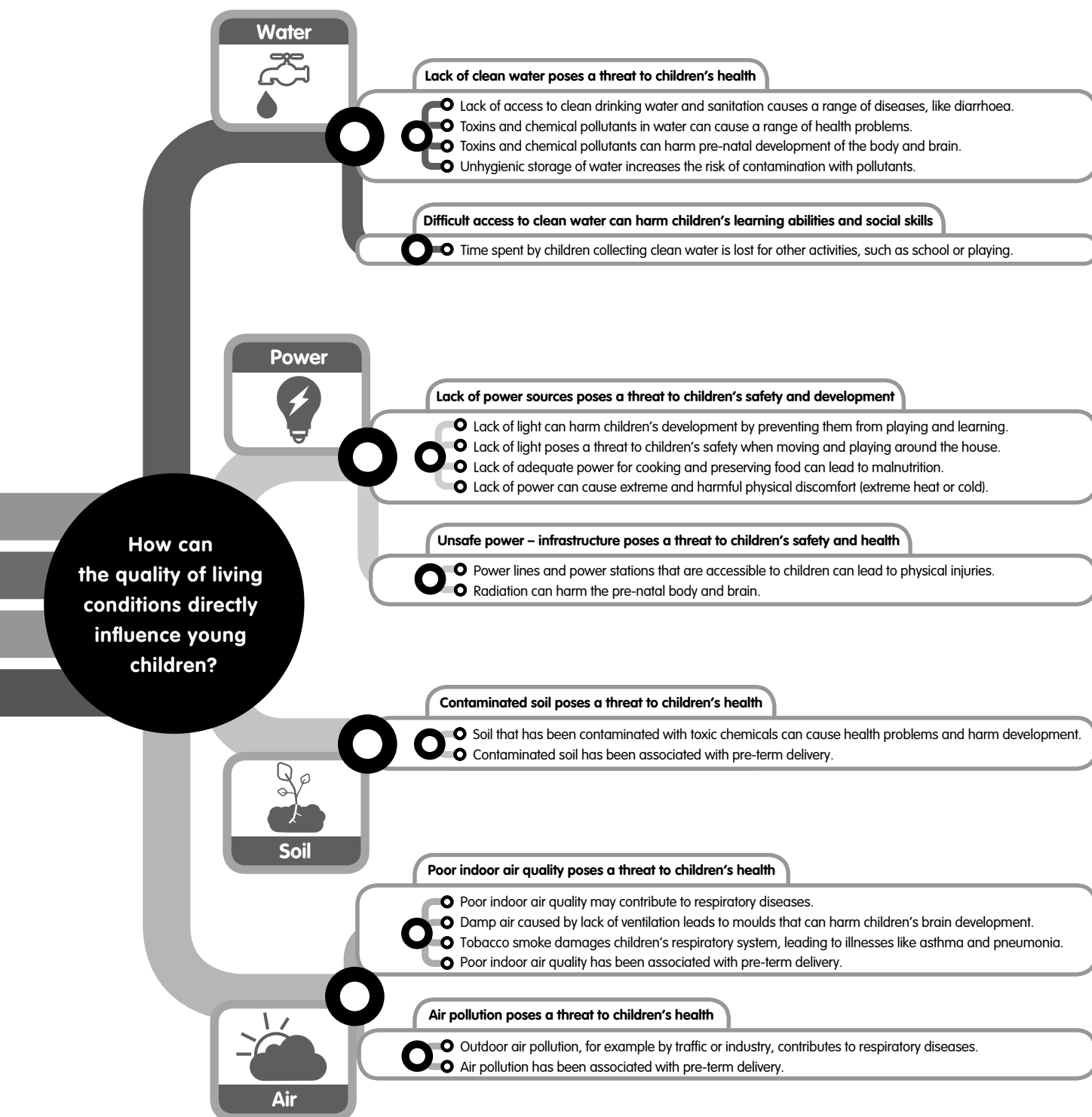
- Bearer, C.F. (1995). How are children different from adults? *Environmental Health Perspectives* 103(6): 7–12.
- Gwyther, M.E. and Jenkins, M. (1998). Migrant farmworker children: health status, barriers to care, and nursing innovations in health care delivery. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* 12(2): 60–6.
- The Pesticide Health Effects Study Group: Rosenstock, L., Kiefer, M., Daniell, W.E., McConnell, R. and Claypoole, K. (1991). Chronic central nervous system effects of acute organophosphate pesticide intoxication. *Lancet* 338(8761): 223–7.
- Sandhaus S. (1998). Migrant health: a harvest of poverty. *American Journal of Nursing* 98(9): 52–4.
- Schenker, M.B. (1996). Preventive medicine and health promotion are overdue in the agricultural workplace. *Journal of Public Health Policy* 17(3): 275–305.
- Villarejo, D. and Baron, S.L. (1999). The occupational health status of hired farm workers. *Occupational Medicine* 14(3): 613–35.
- Von Essen, S.G. and Donham, K.J. (1997). Respiratory diseases related to work in agriculture. In: Langley, R.L., McLymore, R.L., Meggs, W.J. and Roberson, G.T. (eds) *Safety and Health in Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries*. Rockville, MD: Government Institutes.
- Von Essen, S.G. and McCurdy, S.A. (1998). Health and safety risks in production agriculture. *Western Journal of Medicine* 169(4): 214–20.
- Zahn, S.H. and Ward, M.H. (1998). Pesticides and childhood cancer. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 106(3): 893–908.

Note

- 1 Professor Donohoe is a Member of the Social Justice Committee, Physicians for Social Responsibility, a Member of the Board of Advisors, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, and Senior Physician, Internal Medicine, at Kaiser Sunnyside Medical Center.



Information map: Living conditions and young children



The Bernard van Leer Foundation aims to improve opportunities for children who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. This Information Map concerns children from minus 9 months to age 8. This map focuses on the direct influences of children's living conditions and doesn't include second order effects. Additionally, the influence of the living conditions on caregivers (often parents) is not explicitly mentioned. However, many aspects of the living conditions influence caregivers. For example, crowded living conditions heighten stress levels and so increase the risk of domestic violence; difficult access to drinking water means much time is spent by caregivers collecting it. This Information Map was made by The Argumentation Factory, on the basis of literature study and a meeting with international experts. We thank all participants for their contribution.

Seasonal agricultural migration in Turkey and young children

Özsel Belevi, social policy consultant, Development Workshop Cooperative, Ankara, Turkey¹



Field studies suggest that the direct and indirect effects of seasonal agricultural work and seasonal migration on children vary based on children's involvement in migration and agricultural work. Photo • Courtesy Development Workshop Cooperative

What do official figures tell us about the young children of seasonal migrant workers in Turkey, and what policy changes could be made to improve their situation? This article outlines the current state of knowledge and explores three possible axes along which solutions could be based.

From early summer to late autumn, hundreds of thousands of people in Turkey move from their homes to work in the fields, orchards, forests, and meadows across the country, harvesting cotton and potatoes, collecting hazelnuts, oranges and apricots, grazing animals, and logging. Yet we have only a limited understanding of the experiences of these seasonal agricultural migrant workers, which is based on some hard-to-access and questionable official figures and a handful of field studies. We know even less about their children and the challenges these children are

faced with. To a large extent, the seasonal agricultural migrant workers and their children remain invisible to the public eye.

What the official figures tell us is that approximately one-quarter of the labour force in Turkey is in agriculture and about 8% of them are employed as regular or casual workers. Employment in this sector fluctuates through the year, so the seasonal increase in the labour demand is met by both migratory and local temporary workers. According to official figures, in 2011 close to 300,000 people were estimated to have migrated in search of employment in seasonal agricultural work. Some recent reports estimate that about one million people take part in the seasonal agricultural migration. There are no official estimates of the number of local workers or immigrants employed in seasonal agricultural work. There are also no official estimates of the number of

children who are part of the seasonal migration for agricultural work.

Young children

Field studies looking at the conditions of seasonal agricultural workers suggest that the direct and indirect effects of seasonal agricultural work and seasonal migration on children vary based on children's involvement in migration and agricultural work. Some children are employed in seasonal agricultural work in their area of residence so they continue living at their homes. Other children migrate with their families and are also employed as seasonal agricultural workers. Others who migrate with their families do not work in the fields but either perform domestic chores in their temporary homes or do not work at all. A small number of the children migrate without their families and are employed as agricultural workers. Finally, some children are left behind by their families who migrate and remain with relatives in their regular place of residence.

Young children fall under two of these categories: they either migrate with their families but are not involved in domestic or agricultural work; or they are left behind in their regular place of residence without parental care. The field studies give us some information about the challenges faced by young children migrating with their families. The situation of the young children who are left behind with the extended family or neighbours without parental care remains to be studied.

These studies highlight the immediate and long-term risks that seasonal agricultural migration poses to young children's development, health and education. In the course of migration and in the areas of temporary settlement, young children are put at higher risk of being injured in accidents. Poor transport and living conditions, combined with malnutrition, increase the risk of temporary and chronic health problems. Similarly, poor living conditions increase the risk of neglect and abuse.

The same unfavourable conditions also increase the risk of irreversible damage in the longer term. Young

children who migrate with their families for seasonal agricultural work are more likely not to start school, to start school late, and to drop out early, all of which increase the odds of their being trapped in the cycle of poverty and deprivation. Parents and older siblings who are able to devote some time to young children's development in their regular homes may find no free time to spend with them during migration due to their increased workloads. As a result, young children are more likely to be deprived of the attention and support of adults that contribute to their emotional and cognitive development. Seasonal migration and agricultural work also increase young children's vulnerability to violence, neglect, abuse and social exclusion, which in turn adversely affect their emotional and social development.

Legal and socio-economic context

Seasonal agricultural migration is part of a complex equation with numerous actors and a long list of social and economic variables. Among the actors are agricultural workers, agricultural intermediaries, employers, buyers of raw products, processors of raw products, buyers of finished products, national and local authorities, labour unions and, in fact, all of us as consumers of agricultural products. Each of these actors also shows great diversity internally in ways that affect their possible responses to government interventions. For example, some employers are small family enterprises hiring a few workers while others are large agricultural companies employing hundreds of workers.

Among the list of social and economic variables are agricultural subsidies, agricultural commodity markets, labour regulations, land distribution, inter-group relations between migrants and locals, intra-family dynamics, and urban-rural relations. Hence, any legal, economic or social intervention has to take into account the complexity of this equation and the unpredictability of the response of the numerous actors and variables to external interventions, and remain fully aware of the likelihood of 'doing harm' unintentionally both to the people seeking seasonal agricultural work and their children.

Possible interventions

On the legal front, it remains necessary, though not sufficient by itself, to review current legislation in order to identify existing gaps, and make the required revisions. A considerable number of regulations have been enacted during the last few years concerning agricultural labour, yet the overall legal framework remains inadequate due to several legal loopholes, unenforceable regulations, and rules with no teeth. Overall, the current legislation fails to provide accessible labour rights and protection for the seasonal agricultural workers due to the short-term and often undocumented nature of their employment.

‘Strong political and bureaucratic commitments will be essential if new policies and measures are to have long-term results.’

The existing body of legislation also suffers from patchy and inconsistent implementation. On-site inspection, for example, can be a major logistical challenge in certain circumstances where farms are dispersed across vast spaces and some are remote with limited road access. The generally low level of education among the employees, intermediaries, and at times employers also poses a challenge to creating awareness about rights and obligations, and to ensuring that complaint mechanisms are frequently utilised.

On a similar note, there remains the need for concerted efforts by public agencies to ensure a more systematic and consistent implementation of the legal framework. At the very least, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security needs to communicate more effectively the regulations and its inspection priorities to the provincial offices, employment boards, and seasonal migrant agricultural workers’ monitoring boards.

Socio-economic interventions for mitigating the adverse effects of seasonal agricultural work on young children could be designed on three axes:

- 1 reducing the number of people wanting to work as seasonal migrant workers by creating alternative sources of income
- 2 improving the wage and social security policies that directly affect seasonal agricultural workers
- 3 improving the working, travelling, and shelter conditions for everyone in seasonal agricultural work, but particularly for children.

For young children specifically, socio-economic interventions could both aim to prevent the detrimental effects of seasonal agricultural migration on their physical, cognitive and emotional development, and use this as an opportunity to implement programmes that support their overall development. As part of these interventions, priority could be given to implementing centre-, family- and community-based early childhood programmes in places where migratory agricultural workers are accommodated. Similarly, free childcare services could be provided during working hours so that parents do not end up with the choice of having to either take their young children to their work sites or leave them unattended at the temporary living areas.

A possible future intervention that still requires much research and consultation could involve cash and in-kind benefits that encourage relatives and neighbours remaining behind to provide care for the young children of agricultural workers during the migration season.

Strong political and bureaucratic commitments will be essential if new policies and measures are to have long-term results. As discussed, seasonal agricultural work and its effects on children are a multi-dimensional issue and one that affects a large population. Although the Government has set itself the goal of eradicating all paid agricultural labour in seasonal agricultural work for children by 2016, in line with the International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999), it has

so far opted for short-term projects and temporary interventions, which have been shown to be inadequate for coping with an issue of this size. In order to ensure significant and sustainable progress, it is necessary to develop a national policy backed by adequate funding and solid commitment, and to mobilise all relevant public and private actors.

'For young children, socio-economic interventions could both aim to prevent the detrimental effects of seasonal agricultural migration on their physical, cognitive and emotional development, and use this as an opportunity to implement programmes that support their overall development.'

References

- Beleli, Ö. (2012, 2013). *Seasonal Agricultural Work and Children: Problem analysis and policy recommendations*. Ankara: Development Workshop/Kalkınma Atölyesi. Available at: <http://goo.gl/udC1vj> (accessed September 2013).
- International Labour Organization. (1999). *Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour* (Convention No. 182). Geneva: ILO.

Note

- ¹ This article is based on a policy note (Beleli, 2012, 2013) prepared by the author for the Development Workshop Cooperative (www.kalkinmaatolyesi.org).

Seasonal migrants' realities: a study of 686 Turkish households

Müge Artar, Assistant Professor, Centre for Research on Child Culture, Ankara University, Turkey



According to the study, in terms of shelter while employed in seasonal work, most of the respondents said that they lived in some kind of tent.

Photo • Courtesy Adnan Avcı Bucaklışı/ TEGV Firefly Mobile Education Unit

Every year between April and November, hundreds of thousands of seasonal agricultural workers in Turkey leave their permanent residences and migrate to agriculturally intensive areas for jobs such as planting, harvesting and hoeing. Many take their young children. This article describes a study of 686 households, revealing more about the reality of the lives of these seasonal migrant families.

According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, there are around 300,000 registered seasonal migrant workers in Turkey. However, many others are likely to be unregistered: in reality, including children who

travel with their families, the number of seasonal migrants may be at least a million (Tarimda Mevsimlik İçi Göçü Türkiye Durum Özeti, 2012). In an attempt to understand more about these families, we conducted a survey of 686 households in five provinces which are the source of many seasonal migrant workers: Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Hatay, Urfa and Maraş.

Unsurprisingly, we found that seasonal migrant workers are characterised economically by low income levels and lack of regular employment opportunities – 56% of respondents said they had no source of income in the months when they were not migrating for agricultural

work. Only 15% of the households surveyed said they had a regular income all year, and almost three-quarters said they earned a regular income for less than 6 months of the year; 35% stated that their monthly income was 250 Turkish lira (about 95 euros) or less, and a further 27% said it was less than 500 Turkish lira (about 190 euros).

Education levels among survey respondents were much lower than national averages: 35.3% were illiterate and a further 9.7% were literate but did not attend even primary school. Fewer than 10% attended high school. About two-thirds said they had been engaged in seasonal migration for at least the last 10 years.

In theory, laws entitle temporary agricultural workers to social security benefits such as subsidised healthcare. In practice, however, it seems that many families slip through the net, especially as employers may not assist them to claim their rights. 43% of respondents to the household survey said they did not receive any social security benefits.

Shelter, health and childcare

The bus is the most common form of transport for workers who are migrating to another province. Around 40% said that they, rather than their employers or agents, met their own transport costs. Most of the survey respondents (63%) said they had migrated to only one province within the last year; a further 25% named two provinces and the remaining 12% had travelled to three or more. The provinces of Turkey which receive the highest number of seasonal workers include Malatya, Adana, Giresun, Konya, Ankara and Kayseri.

In terms of shelter while employed in seasonal work, most of the respondents (65%) said that they lived in some kind of tent. Mostly, the accommodation in which workers stay is owned by the employer (75%) and arranged by either the employer or agent (83%); around one in seven respondents reported owning or arranging their own shelter.

Table 1 Type of accommodation for migrant workers

Shelter	%
Nylon tent	43.3
Cloth tent	21.7
House/apartment	13.1
Warehouse	6.1
Outdoors	1.6
Other	14.2

About half of families reported having electricity in their shelter for at least part of the day, but the other half had no electricity at all; this poses serious challenges for keeping food from spoiling. The main sources of drinking water are springs (28.2%), containers shipped in by the employer (22.2%), fountains (20%) or wells (10.4%). Sanitation is a serious problem: in 23.2% of cases, families had to defecate in the open field, with 45% needing to dig holes. By contrast, in their permanent homes, over 90% of respondents said they had piped water and more than half had an indoor toilet.

In 41% of cases, families said they lived in or near the field where the crops were grown, which implies potential exposure to agricultural chemicals. The dangers posed to health by this are discussed in the article by Dr Martin Donohoe on pages 12–13. Only 15% of survey respondents reported seeing a health professional; interviews revealed fears about the cost of hospital treatment and hostile attitudes among health personnel towards Kurdish-speaking migrants (Özbekmezci and Sahil, 2004; Çınar and Lordoğlu, 2011).

When migrating for agricultural work 65% of respondents said they took their young children with them. When we asked what happened to their children while they were working, 42% said they took the children to the fields, which implies potential exposure to hazardous chemicals and machinery. While at least this means parents are able to be close to their children, in many interviews it was stated that employers are critical of working parents when they take time to keep an eye on their children. Of the children who do not come to

the field during working hours, most are looked after by an adult family member, but in our study 5.9% were looked after by older children and 10.6% were left entirely on their own.

Table 2 Types of care for children of agricultural workers

Childcare while working in the field	%
Comes to the field with us	42.0
Adult family member	31.9
Nobody	10.6
Elder siblings	5.9
Hired caregiver	4.3
Other	5.3

The role of agents

As we attempted to understand the situation of seasonal migrant workers, it was important also to interview the agents who play a significant role in bringing workers and employers together. Legally, agents should be registered with the Turkish Employment Agency, but only 9 of the 55 we surveyed said they possessed the necessary certificate and 36 said they had no information about their legal status and obligations.

Many of the agents told us in interviews that they choose to work informally because employers do not want to work with formally registered agents; they would then have to have their employees registered and pay a part of their social security contributions, which they do not want to do. This situation severely limits the capacity of agents to tackle problems related to such issues as shelter, remuneration, accommodation and health.

Training and extension programmes for agents are one obvious possible approach to the problems highlighted by the survey. However, given that as many as 17 of the 55 agents we interviewed did not have even primary school education, the potential for such training is open to debate. What is not open to debate is that action needs to be taken urgently to address the living conditions of families engaged in seasonal agricultural work, and their effects on the physical and mental development of young children.

References

- Çınar, S. and Lordoğlu, K. (2011). *Mevsimlik tarım işçileri: marabadan ücretli tarım işçiliğine (Seasonal agriculture workers: from cropper to salaried agriculture labour)*. Presentation at 3rd International Symposium on Social Rights, University of Kocaeli, 25–26 October. Available at: www.sosyalhaklar.net/2011/bildiri/2011sosyalhaklar.pdf (accessed October 2013).
- Mevsimlik İşçi Göçü İletişim Ağı (MİGA). (2012). Tarımda mevsimlik işçi göçü Türkiye durum özeti (Migration of seasonal agriculture workers: case summary, Turkey). Available at: http://goc.bilgi.edu.tr/docs/FES-dünyadan_12.pdf (accessed October 2013).
- Özbekmezci, Ş. and Sahil, S. (2004). Mevsimlik tarım işçilerinin sosyal, ekonomik ve barınma sorunlarının analizi (Analysis of the social, economic and housing problems of seasonal agricultural workers). *Gazi Üniversitesi Mühendislik Mimarlık Fakültesi Dergisi* 19(3): 261–74.

The children of seasonal migrants in Turkey are still vulnerable

Mehmet Ülger and Astrid van Unen, journalists, Netherlands



At the end of each March, together with her family, Zara leaves Urfa, in the south-eastern part of Turkey, to do seasonal agricultural work.
Photo • Courtesy U-Producties

In 2010 a film documentary, *Children of the Season*, told the story of child labour and poor working and living conditions among Turkish seasonal migrants employed to harvest hazelnuts. Its reception was explosive: governments, companies and international organisations were in uproar, and the film triggered a raft of activity. However, as this article by the documentary makers relates, the children of seasonal migrants still remain vulnerable.

Uzunisa is seen as a flagship camp in Ordu, one of Turkey's hazelnut-growing Black Sea provinces, in the fight against the deplorable living conditions of seasonal workers. We were there in 2013 to follow up, as we do every year, on our 2010 documentary *Children of the Season*, made partly thanks to a contribution by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

On our unannounced visit, we meet Münever, a beautiful young girl with long wavy hair. She is carrying her baby sister, tied to her back. She pulls the straps every couple of minutes to pull her little sister straight.

Münever tells us that she is 10, but she looks more like a 6 year old. 'That is because,' she explains, 'I have had to carry heavy things since I was little. So I never grew much.' We know that parents on the plantations often encourage their children to pretend they are older, which can be useful in case of spot checks against child labour. In any case, Münever enjoys talking to us. She tells us that the baby is heavy for her, and she does not enjoy having to look after her. After a short while, Münever trudges back to her tent. She walks under a large banner that reads 'Child labour is forbidden by law'. It seems that childcare is not considered to be labour.

Nonetheless, in 2010 the camp was nothing like it is today. Now it has toilets, showers, basins and running water. The situation of the very youngest children of travelling seasonal workers who live in tents is often much more miserable and saddening than this.

We saw this once again last summer, both in the tented camps in the hazelnut-growing regions on the Black Sea and in the agricultural areas on the Mediterranean coast. Once again, the problems that we saw included: a general lack of hygiene in the tented camps; children washing themselves and swimming in dirty water; a general lack of sanitary facilities; no regular running water in one of the camps in Ordu; too few toilets so that people would relieve themselves anywhere outdoors. Very young children in particular go when and where they need to. This may be just outside the tent where other children play.

Many children suffer from undernourishment. For them, the tented camps are an unsafe area, both physically and emotionally. The youngest ones often walk around in bare feet, often half dressed. They walk, fall and run around among the chickens and are thus vulnerable to illnesses. They play with whatever they find on the ground, because educational or stimulatory play materials are non-existent. The children receive very little attention because their mothers are often too tired after work to take care of them, or are away because they are working. This situation creates child-mothers like Münever, who is still a child herself, still learning and still growing.

The documentary and its impact

The main character in our 45-minute 2010 documentary was little Zara. Zara was 9 years old and worked picking hazelnuts for 11 hours in the burning sun, day in, day out. Her little sister took care of her youngest brother and the tent. The rest of the family worked in the plantations.

At the end of every March, Zara's family leaves Urfa, in the south-eastern part of Turkey, to do seasonal agricultural work. They travel all over the country to

pick strawberries, apricots, sugar beet and onions. Picking hazelnuts is always one part of their work. Zara's family is a typical family that symbolises millions of agricultural labourers who travel constantly with their families, trying to survive. The film premiered in November 2010, following a news item on this subject for the Dutch current affairs programme, *EénVandaag*.

The message was clear: 75% of all the world's hazelnuts come from Turkey – contributing about 2 billion dollars to Turkey's economy – and they are in large part picked by children's hands. These hazelnuts are used in many products such as chocolates, ice cream, mixed nuts, salads and oil.

The documentary had immediate political impact in the Netherlands, with demands for international pressure to be put on Turkey. In the House of Representatives in the Netherlands, five political parties submitted questions to ministers. This led to the Dutch embassy in Ankara carrying out research which confirmed the existence of child labour in the hazelnut sector. One year later, when we made a follow-up programme for *EénVandaag*, questions were again raised in the House by nine political parties. During her trade mission to Turkey in 2012, Minister Ploumen's first action on behalf of Foreign Trade and Joint Cooperation was to sign an agreement with the International Labour Organization to start an anti-child labour project in the hazelnut sector. Ploumen allocated 90,000 euros for this.

Questions were asked of the European Commission in the European Parliament, and child labour became an item of negotiation in Turkey's accession to the EU.

Authorities in denial

Responding to this pressure, the Turkish Government tasked the governors of the relevant provinces with improving its image vis-à-vis seasonal workers. A number of changes followed. In Ordu, the local authorities improved two tented camps by providing sanitation facilities, running water and a playground. Up to 2011, the seasonal workers had just camped anywhere. In another hazelnut-producing province,

the town of Giresun built about 20 barracks equipped with washing and showering facilities and kitchens. Everything was very clean and there was also a playground for the little children. Since last year, banners have been put in both areas with the warning 'Children under 16 may not work'.

While these are obviously welcome steps, we fear that the local authorities are now in denial about the extent to which child labour is still used. Every year, we follow up on the *Children of the Season* documentary, meeting governors or their representatives. Typically, they strongly deny that child labour goes on – while at the same time telling us about their campaign against child labour. It seems rather contradictory: if child labour is not a problem, why the need for the campaign? In reality, we know that child labour still exists because every year we stop at plantations at random. And we always hear children's voices. Sometimes they are singing, sometimes they are complaining, sometimes they are giggling. But the children are always working.

'Every year since 2010, we follow up on the Children of the Season documentary, meeting governors or their representatives in Turkey.'

In March of this year, a conference took place in Giresun with the objective of raising awareness about child labour, informing plantation owners, and reaching agreement between hazelnut producers and government on how to end child labour for good. We were invited to show our documentary and to provide further information. However, the discussion that followed irritated the provincial governor, who claimed that child labour no longer existed in Giresun and that the children of the seasonal workers were in his beautiful province for holidays. We felt called upon to disagree, and the discussion ended with the governor walking out of the room.

Industry-led action

The conference organiser was Özer Akbaşlı, former chair of Giresun's provincial Chamber of Agriculture (*Ziraat Odası*). Through his family in the Netherlands, he had seen the *EénVandaag* programme and was deeply shocked. He says:

Our view of children of seasonal workers, and even of our own children, has completely changed. We always say that our children are our future. We must protect them as best we can. We think about everything that has to do with children, but when it comes to work, we degrade them. We knew that there were problems in the agricultural sector with child labour, but we thought that the children only worked for short periods so to leave it be. After seeing your programme and documentary, the view of very many people on this issue, including my own, has changed.

Not only was Akbaşlı deeply shocked, he also took action straight away. In 2011 he declared his 200-hectare plantation free of child labour. He has also managed to persuade 89 other farmers from the same province to follow his example.

We are now more aware, look out better and are more selective. If we phone labour agents, we now say, 'My friend, we do not want children under 16 any more.' At first they would ask, 'Mr Chairman, can't you take even one?' Then I would say, 'No, not even one. Not even a half or a quarter. From now on, children will not work for us any more.' But they would eventually agree, which just proved that it was possible all along.

He indicates the field behind him where hazelnuts are drying and says with pride, 'Look! This harvest is completely free of child labour.'

Under the leadership of Akbaşlı, the Giresun Chamber of Agriculture started the 'Laughing Children' project. He explains:

We first started by informing farmers. There are so many agreements that say that we should not let children work. There are agreements in the Turkish constitution and in the UN treaties that Turkey has signed. But maybe we were not well informed about what the agreements said.

After that, about 5000 leaflets were distributed. ‘Then we placed advertisements on television, radio and in newspapers to draw attention to our project,’ he says.

In 2012, Akbaşlı built new living quarters for his own seasonal workers. There are separate rooms for men and women, bunk beds, showers, a kitchen and a shared dining and living area. He has high expectations of his project, which also organises activities for the children who travel with their families but are not allowed to work, including a photography project. The children were asked to photograph the hazelnut harvest of 2013 from their own perspective, and the photos will be used in an exhibition which will be part of the awareness campaign.

The farmers who joined the project are supposed to raise awareness among the plantations in their areas.

Akbaşlı explains:

It is a community approach, because the Laughing Children project alone cannot reach enough people. In the future, the number of farmers taking part should grow from 89 to 8900, and then to 89,000. Only then can we keep ahead of the problem.

Pressure through buyers

In the meantime, Akbaşlı has entered into a collaboration with the processing factory, Noor, which pays the farmers an extra 4% if they guarantee that they supply child labour-free hazelnuts. With Turkish hazelnuts used in the products of major brands, consumer pressure is an obvious route towards tackling child labour and improving living and working conditions.

Unfortunately all the major hazelnut purchasers initially rejected the documentary. This is perhaps not surprising, as being associated with child labour is very damaging to one’s image. However, the approach of multinationals appears to be evolving. After a period of reflection, one of them commissioned an American NGO, the Fair Labor Association, to assess the situation of child labour in the hazelnut sector. What the company did with the results is still unclear.

The German supermarket chain ReWe, which also uses hazelnuts in its products, started a project for the children in seasonal workers’ tented camps in 2012. This year, in the Uzunisa tented camp, we saw a number of young people from the *Hayata Destek* (Support to Life) association, funded by ReWe, walking around and keeping the youngest children busy. The best-known international buyer of hazelnuts is Ferrero, which produces Nutella. On our visit this year we came across a number of researchers in Düzce who had been tasked by this Italian multinational to look into the situation of child labour in the hazelnut harvesting season.

While these are encouraging gestures, it remains to be seen if they will translate into effective and comprehensive action to tackle child labour and improve living conditions for the young children of seasonal migrant workers. We look forward to seeing what has changed when we return in 2014.

A healthy and safe environment for young migrants at urban Indian worksites

Umi Daniel, Regional Head, Migration Thematic Unit, *Aide et Action*, South Asia, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India



The study also intended to inform an attempt to come up with a replicable model for creating a safe and healthy environment for the young children of seasonal migrant workers, in which they could enjoy care and learning opportunities. Photo • Courtesy Aid et Action

This article shares the findings of a study conducted by *Aide et Action* and the Bernard van Leer Foundation to assess the situation of seasonal migrant workers' children in Indian cities. It also describes a model intervention at a brickworks in Hyderabad to explore how safer and healthier living conditions can be created for these children.

An estimated 326 million people in India are migrants, according to the National Sample Survey in 2007–08. However, while data on permanent migrants are relatively easy to collect, seasonal migration often goes under the radar. Laws exist to protect migrant workers' basic rights to housing and other entitlements, but in practice the invisibility of seasonal migrants leaves them vulnerable to spending half of their lives in testing conditions where basic services, civic amenities, safe environments, entitlements and rights are lacking.

Seasonal migrant workers are typically poor and marginal – debt-ridden farmers, farm workers, landless labourers, tribal, Dalit and other vulnerable people – and they have little capacity to bargain for their constitutional rights as workers. They and their

families are consequently often forced to work and live under practically subhuman conditions, in makeshift tarpaulin-covered houses that are now a common sight in almost all big cities in India. These living conditions are detrimental to young children's growth and development.

Brickworks are among the biggest employers of seasonal migrants. Globally, India's brickmaking industry is second only to China, producing close to 140 billion bricks a year. Seasonal migrant labourers are recruited from different states, and children form an integral part of the labour unit; indeed, there are works which are tailor-made for children. Some engage in making mud dough, moulding, staking and also head-loading the bricks to the furnace. There are also children who work as babysitters, looking after their siblings. The workers live with their families inside the worksite for 7–8 months and return to their own villages before the onset of the monsoon season.

Aide et Action is an international development agency that has worked in India for past three decades, on projects such as creating access to basic education and safe

learning environments for seasonal migrant families at their worksites. *Aide et Action's* Migration Information and Resource Centre (MIRC) has partnered with the Benard van Leer Foundation to assess the situation of young migrants and create replicable models for making their environments safer and healthier. In 2013, *Aide et Action* and the Foundation initiated a study to assess the situation of young migrants at worksites, with the aim of making their issues visible, heard and acted upon by government, markets and civil society.

The study, which is nearing completion and will be published soon, was undertaken in seven cities in India: Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Guwahati, Patna and Bhopal. These were chosen based on the pace of growth of their population, industry and infrastructure; because of their faster economic growth, these cities have been attracting large numbers of seasonal migrant workers. The study covered a sample of 3500 seasonal migrant households living with one or more young children at a total of 361 worksites. In all, these households comprised 15,103 people, of whom 47% were children and 27% aged below 6 years. Of the worksites, 56% were brickworks, 40% construction sites, and the rest engaged in stone crushing, road building and laying pipelines.

'In 2013, a study started to assess the situation of young migrants at worksites, with the aim of making their issues visible, heard and acted upon by government, markets and civil society.'

Study findings

Most of the workers come from rural and tribal areas. It is interesting that 45% are classified as BPL (Below Poverty Line) and 57% are from scheduled tribes or castes, given that the Indian constitution has made special provision for the welfare of these groups. In reality, these poor and vulnerable people are unable to access basic facilities when they move from one region to other as migrants. For example, only 17% of the children

surveyed were found to be in school, and only 5% had access to preschool education.

Regarding living conditions, 56% of households reported living in makeshift tarpaulin-covered houses, 41% in other kinds of temporary shelter, and only 3% lived in houses with better conditions. The study found that 90% of families lived in one-roomed dwellings, and 97% of children had no separate living space. Shockingly, 91% of houses had no ventilation and experienced severe heat, dust, smoke and risk of suffocation because 63% of households cooked their food inside the one room they were living in.

The study starkly reveals how dangerous it is for the children to live in close proximity to worksites. Children of 306 households – just over 8% of those surveyed – reported having sustained injuries in accidents on the worksite, including falling from buildings under construction. Not only this, 2% were often abused by the contractors or owners. Being unfamiliar with their surroundings, 61% of the children said they didn't go out to play for fear of being abused. Most of the families and their children reported facing discrimination at the worksite.

The study recorded food insecurity among seasonal migrant workers' children, with 25% of the households not eating two square meals per day; 51% of children did not receive a balanced diet, and went without vegetables, meat, eggs, fish and milk. This implies higher levels of malnutrition-related ailments and 64% of the households reported suffering from various diseases and ailments at their workplace, 58% having no access to proper health care facilities.

In general, young children of migrant workers are invisible in urban governance, programme planning and policy frameworks. They are much more likely to enjoy access to basic facilities such as housing, health care, education, early childhood services, entitlements and security in their native villages. When they move to cities, it is as if they become alien citizens in their own country.

The Hyderabad model

Our study intended not only to shed more light on the plight of young migrants, but to inform an attempt to come up with a replicable model for creating a safe and healthy environment for the young children of seasonal migrant workers, in which they could enjoy care and learning opportunities. With the help of its Hyderabad regional office colleague, MIRC made a blueprint for prototype low-cost housing with child-friendly spaces. A young local architect was hired to research how migrants lived in their home villages and came up with a design.

The design was further discussed with owners of brickworks in Hyderabad, to find one who was especially enthusiastic about providing decent housing for their workers. Typically, when the migrant workers – most of whom are from the neighbouring states of Odisha and Chhattisgarh – reach the worksite during November and December, the first moulded unbaked bricks are used to construct their houses, with a roof of polythene sheets. Measuring 8 x 7 feet with a maximum height of 5 feet (roughly 2.5 x 2 x 1.5 m), these are the houses where the migrants are going to cook, eat and shelter with their families for almost 7–8 months.

After visiting several locations, finally the choice was made to build the housing at LBM brickworks in Annaram village of Jinnaram Mandal in Medak district. This site is located 20 km outside Hyderabad city limits and has over 100 migrant families from Odisha and Chhattisgarh working in the brick kilns, including 65 children aged under 14 years.

The firm of architects '23° Design Shift' was engaged to plan and execute the project. The entire site for the housing project measured 3200 square feet (about 300 m²), to include 12 dwelling units, child-friendly community space and backyards. The living space was designed in such a way that sleeping areas for adults and children were demarcated, with spaces for storage, and the cooking area was in the courtyard or backyard. Two public toilets were constructed. A cavity wall construction method was used, so that

the dwelling spaces would be cooler in summer, and ventilation shafts were provided in between the cavity walls in order to radiate the heat outwards. The project was completed in April 2013. Eleven families were each allotted a house, while the twelfth house was used as the worksite's first aid and medical centre. Andhra Pradesh Department of Education has also started a worksite school for the children in the community space.

'When young children move to cities, it is as if they become alien citizens in their own country.'

The houses have profoundly changed the experience of seasonal migrant families, such as 40-year-old Timan Karvel, his wife Padma and their four children, who have migrated to work at the brickworks for the last 10 years. Padma says:

I used to struggle a lot to take care of my kids and belongings. During summer, we used to sleep outside and my kids inside the hut. When it rained, we all used to huddle inside and worry about whether the wind would blow away the tarpaulin roof. Now our living place is much better and my kids are also going to the child learning centre.

Chandrama, a 12-year-old girl, says:

The brick kiln area was always windy and dusty, but the new place is spacious and cool. Before we had no place to play since heavy vehicles were always moving around. Now, my brother, I and our friends have a very good place to play, learn and spend time. We are also now getting midday meals served by the school authority.

Towards replication

Regional Manager Shredhar Methar, who executed the project, says:

We have already spoken to the local government administration, who is interested to learn from the model and replicate it.

Babu Rao, the owner of the brickworks, adds:

I was sceptical when Aide et Action first talked to me about the project. However, now the houses are complete, people have

started demanding to have them for all the workers and their families. I will try to replicate this since it will increase the output of my labourers.

Migration is here to stay, as people are pulled to the cities by the hope of a better livelihood and pushed from rural areas by factors such as poverty, natural calamity, conflict and human insecurity. It is estimated that the population of India's cities will double by 2030. Seasonal migrants who live part of the year on worksites are harder to track and reach than permanent migrants who settle in slums – but reaching them is imperative for their children to be able access the basic entitlements and services required for human survival.

The *Humara Bachpan* campaign: a success for seasonal migrant children in Odisha

Jyoti Prakash Brahma, *Humara Bachpan*, Bhubaneswar, India



The *Humara Bachpan* campaign set out to create 8 model child learning centres serving 14 brick kiln worksites within the suburban locations of Bhubaneswar. Photo • Courtesy *Humara Bachpan*

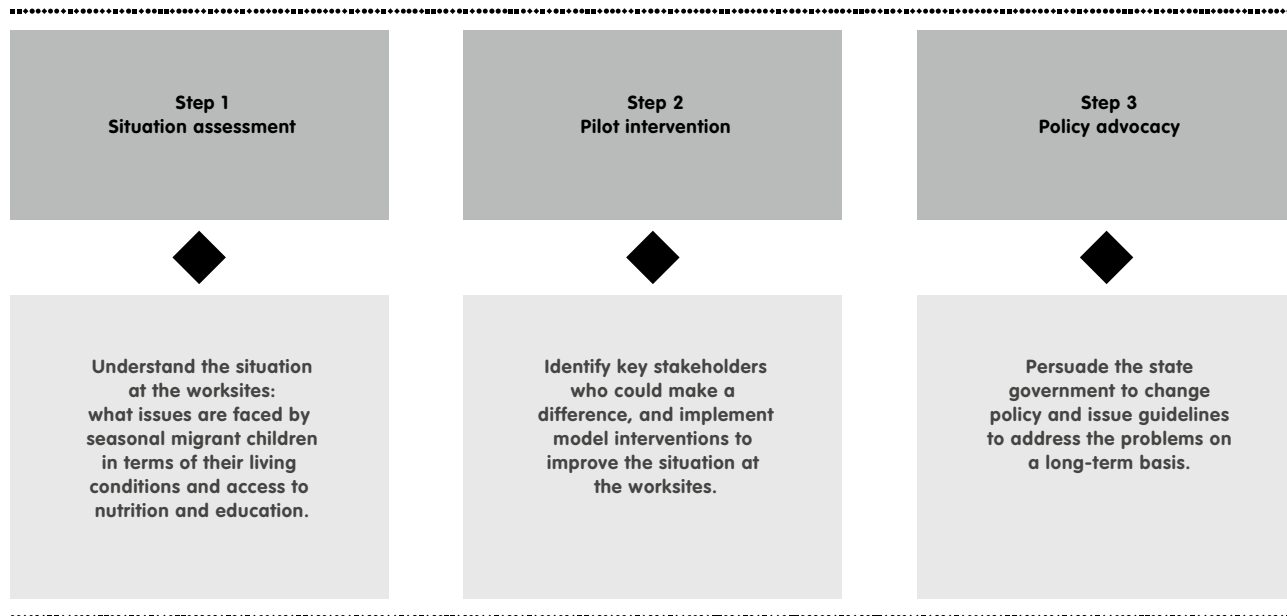
Many rural families in the Indian state of Odisha migrate seasonally to cities to work in areas such as brick making and construction. Their living conditions are typically dire, and in practice their young children cannot access the state services to which they theoretically have a right. This article describes how the *Humara Bachpan* campaign successfully persuaded the State Government of Odisha to issue guidelines about providing government services to seasonal migrant children.

Puspa Thapa, an 8-year-old girl, was in class II at her school in Bharamund village, Balangir district, in the Indian state of Odisha. Her little sister, aged 3, attended a local early childhood centre. Needing to earn money, her parents decided the family would migrate to Bhubaneswar city to seek work in brick making – a

seasonal activity, starting each year after the monsoons. Puspa and her sister asked if there would be schools and preschools for them to attend in Bhubaneswar. Her parents didn't know. When they arrived, Puspa discovered there was no school for her, no preschool for her sister, and that their living conditions at the worksite were deplorable.

Puspa is not alone. According to a study by the Migration Information and Resource Centre of *Aide et Action* (who write further about their work on seasonal migrants on pages 30–33 of this issue of *Early Childhood Matters*), 45% of Indian children aged 0–8 years who migrate seasonally with their parents are deprived of any access to early childcare, education, and nutrition and basic health services. In states like Odisha, with a large proportion of people living in poverty, many rural dwellers seasonally

Figure 1 The steps of the campaign



migrate to fast-growing urban areas both within and outside of the state. These illiterate and unskilled people are brought to cities by labour supply agents to work in brick kilns, stone crusher units and construction sites, where living conditions for migrant families are typically dismal.

In their villages, young children can usually access basic government welfare services provided by the local Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), or *Anganwadi* centre. In theory, the same should apply when their families migrate seasonally to cities – in 2011 the Government of India’s Ministry of Women and Child Development instructed all state governments to extend the ICDS services to the migratory population. Likewise, in principle school-age children should be covered by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 – which guarantees education from the age of 6 to 14 – even when migrating seasonally. In practice, however, this has not been implemented. Seasonal migrants are not documented by the government, so they remain effectively invisible in urban governance, and there is no government policy or set of guidelines specifically addressing the rights of migrant children.

The *Humara Bachpan* campaign

The plight of children like Pupsa in urban Odisha led to *Humara Bachpan* (‘Our Early Childhood’), a national campaign focused on safe and healthy living conditions for young children in urban poverty, to choose seasonal migrant children as one of its major strategic intervention areas. Supported, among other organisations, by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, the *Humara Bachpan* campaign is a network of children, community members, NGOs and other stakeholders.

The objective of the intervention was to improve the living conditions of poor seasonal migrant children by providing better access to basic amenities including nutrition and education. Mothers working as daily labourers have limited time to provide direct care for their children, so centres are needed to offer alternative care. The campaign set out to create 8 model child learning centres serving 14 brick kiln worksites within the suburban locations of Bhubaneswar, in collaboration with the Migration Information and Resource Centre of *Aide et Action*. The plan was to use this pilot intervention to advocate for policy changes that would link migrant children to existing government-run services.

Step 1: Situation assessment

When the campaign assessed the situation at the worksites, it found that children come with their parents to the brick kilns in the months of October or November, returning to their villages in May or June. That is, they generally stay for a period of 6–8 months. The migrant workers are paid less than the minimum wage prescribed by the government, meaning that families have insufficient money for food and children lack adequate nutrition. The Indian Government offers complementary nutrition programmes through *Anganwadi* centres, but they are not accessed by seasonal migrants.

The situation assessment found that there were government-run early childhood centres within 1 km of the worksites, but they did not enrol the children of seasonal workers. This was because there was no specific policy mandating the admission of migrant children. The young children not enrolled in ECCE centres were therefore left under the supervision of their older siblings, which in turn made it more difficult for those older children to continue their studies.

Step 2: Pilot intervention

The situation assessment helped to identify the key stakeholders whose cooperation was critical for the campaign: brick kiln owners, parents, and relevant government departments. The campaign managed to secure the cooperation of all these stakeholders to implement a pilot intervention. The brick kiln owners provided a dedicated space and a temporary structure to be used as child learning centre, which provided care and early education to nearly 400 young migrant children while their mothers were at work.

Alongside running the child learning centres, the intervention sought to build community ownership and awareness on the importance of early childhood education and care. Mothers' committees were formed, and trained 177 mothers on nutrition, health and hygiene.

To provide nutritional support to these children, the campaign needed to engage local ICDS services. The

campaign lobbied the Secretary of Odisha's Department of Women and Child Development, who said she did not have the budget or staff to open an additional ICDS centre at the worksites, but committed to provide take-home rations. The Department's Director of Social Welfare subsequently became active in linking the campaign and brick kiln owners with nearby government-run centres and officials, to work together on providing both nutrition and learning materials.

Step 3: Policy advocacy

With the state government's positive response to the pilot intervention, the campaign turned its attention to persuading the government to put in place the policy framework to assume responsibility for all seasonal migrant children. The situation analysis showed that absence of specific state government guidelines on the education and care of young migrant children was one of their main hurdles in accessing education and nutrition. Along with the National Commission for Protection of Children's Rights, the campaign successfully persuaded the state government to issue guidelines on extending nutrition services to these children and opening the required number of early childhood care centres at the worksites.

'The objective of the intervention was to improve the living conditions of poor seasonal migrant children by providing better access to basic amenities including nutrition and education.'

The campaign also advocated for guidelines on education for migrant children of school age. Neighbourhood primary schools do not enrol these migrant children, as they arrive when the annual enrolment process is over, and there are no government guidelines on admissions outside of the enrolment period. Consequently, seasonal migrant children either work as child labourers with their parents on the kilns, or look after younger siblings, and resume their studies only on their return to their

home villages. After the campaign's advocacy, the Odisha Government brought out guidance to enrol seasonal migrant children in neighbourhood schools.

It is often a risk in the Indian context that guidelines may be prepared but not implemented. Therefore, as follow-up action, the campaign will conduct meetings with the implementing government department, policy makers, brick kiln owners, and parents of seasonal migrant children, and engage strategically with the media to highlight the issue, which will create pressure on the government to implement the guidelines in both letter and spirit.

The way ahead

The guidelines came too late for Puspa this year, but if her parents migrate again next year, she and her little sister should have better prospects of accessing primary education and early childhood care respectively. This successful intervention is an encouraging example of how campaigns can make a difference in improving living conditions and access to services for seasonal migrant children, by working in collaboration with all the stakeholders – the worksite owners, the migrant parents, and local government departments. The campaign is now taking steps to replicate the model in other states of India, taking account of differences in local conditions.

Meeting migrant families' needs through on-site crèches

Mridula Bajaj, Executive Director, and Mayanka Gupta, Programme Officer, Mobile Crèches, New Delhi, India



Establishing a crèche at a construction site requires convincing employers of the need and the benefits of having a crèche, while also developing people and systems to work with children in difficult circumstances. Photo • Courtesy Mobile Crèches

Mobile Crèches works with employers to offer on-site crèche facilities to the young children of seasonal migrant workers who are typically unable to access government-run services in the cities to which they migrate in search of work. This article describes how the Mobile Crèches models work, evidence of their impact, and a study conducted by the organisation into the conditions of Indian migrants.

Many seasonal migrants in India work in construction, the country's second-largest employer after agriculture. The relationship of Mobile Crèches with construction workers and their children goes back to 1969, when Mobile Crèches (MC) opened its first crèche at the

Gandhi Darshan site at Rajghat in Delhi. Now, 44 years on, the living and working conditions of these construction workers have not improved much, and the plight of migrants continues to be largely ignored by policymakers.

Mobile Crèches carried out a study¹ in 2008 to understand more about the families of migrant construction workers. The study looked at 425 families in 15 construction sites in the National Capital Region. These were among its findings:

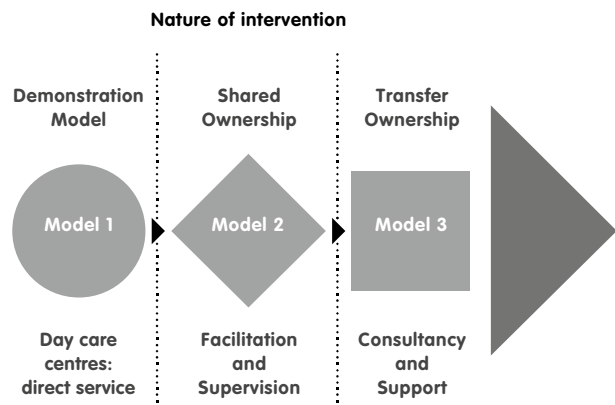
- Short-term migration was common – two-thirds of the families stayed less than one year at a site.
- Most families lived on the work site, in difficult and unhealthy conditions: cramped shacks made from tin

or brick, with asbestos or tin roofs. With no electricity to power fans, these shelters get extremely hot. Only half the workers surveyed had access to clean drinking water and only 23% to clean toilets.

- Working conditions were similarly deplorable, with the construction sector being well known in India for its disregard of labour laws. In many cases workers were deprived of minimum wage rates and social security entitlements such as maternity allowance or old age pension. Workers were not registered with the Delhi Construction Workers' Welfare Board and there was no awareness of the Building and Other Construction Workers Act, 1996, or the benefits of registration.
- Conditions tended to be particularly exploitative for women, who do the least-skilled jobs and on an average receive two-thirds of the wages that men earn.
- Workers lacked access to basic services for bringing up young children, such as health care, nutritional support, schools, preschools and immunisation services. None of the families surveyed was using the nearest *anganwadi*, or government-sponsored childcare centre, reflecting a lack of specific outreach strategies to reach frequently mobile populations.
- Two out of three children were malnourished.
- Workers' hopes of improving their financial situation had largely not worked out. Only 3% of families said they had been able to increase their assets through making a move from the village. Their increased income was largely consumed by spending on food, health care and paying off debts. Health was found to be the highest single reason for incurring debts, with 84% of the families reporting regular, monthly health expenses.

India has a rich tradition of caring for children through the extended family, but when parents migrate that network is lost. Migrant mothers must leave their infants unattended for long hours while they work and breastfeeding is difficult, if not impossible. Children are largely cared for by siblings who are barely older than themselves.

Figure 1 Mobile Crèches models



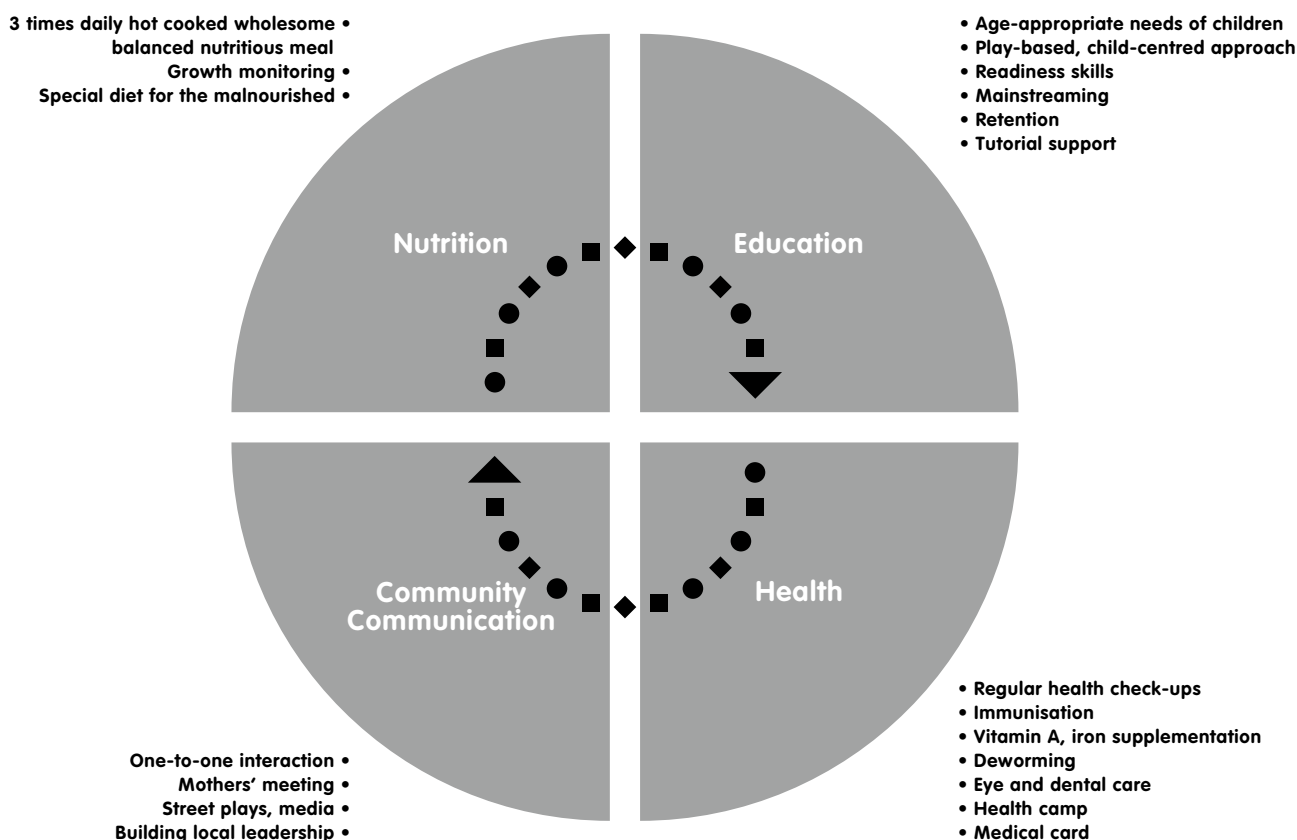
The three models of Mobile Crèches

MC began with the objective of providing safety, care, health and education for the children of working women at construction sites. Establishing a crèche at a construction site was a difficult task that required convincing employers of the need and the benefits of having a crèche, while also developing people and systems to work with children in difficult circumstances.

The organisation provides childcare services under three models. In the first, 'demonstration' model, MC itself runs the childcare provision and the contribution and participation of the employer are minimal. In the second, 'shared ownership' model, MC motivates and facilitates the employer to implement and finance the services, and provides technical support. In the third, 'transfer ownership' model, the organisation provides consultancy and support but complete responsibility for providing quality childcare rests with the employer.

As shown in Figure 1, the aim is always to move towards the third model, gradually reducing the involvement of MC, with the aim of the site owner being able to carry on independently. In some recent cases it has been possible to skip the first model and move directly to the second. MC currently operates 22 day care centres at construction sites, and provides support through training and

Figure 2 Mobile Crèches integrated programme



facilitation at 20 construction sites. To date, it has reached out to 750,000 children, trained 6500 women as childcare workers, run 650 day care centres and partnered with 200 builders.

As shown in Figure 2, Mobile Crèches offer a combination of services including nutritional and health support and education. Daily activities are infused with storytelling, dancing, singing, games and locally made toys, celebrating a diversity of cultures and traditions. Community engagement lies at the core of MC's operations, and parents work closely with MC staff and volunteers to spread awareness about issues relevant to child development and education, health, nutrition, antenatal care and parenting.

Impact of interventions

MC undertook a study² in 2008–09 to establish the impact on children of attending an MC crèche operating its new theme-based, child-centred, age-appropriate curriculum, with its emphasis on language, number exercises and physical games to further children's cognitive, social and emotional development. The total sample for the study was 100 children aged between 3 and 6 years, from 16 MC centres, and it used a composite 'Developmental Assessment Measure' administered by a trained investigator, working individually with each child to measure cognition, language, perceptual-motor skills (writing readiness) and socio-emotional competence.

As it was not practically possible to generate a comparable control group with no experience of the crèches, the study compared children with more than 200 days of exposure to the curriculum with a control group of children who had under 100 days of exposure. The hypothesis was that children who had experienced over 200 days would score better on developmental and school-readiness skills than those who had attended fewer than 100 days.

Despite the relatively small sample size, the results were encouraging. The children with more than 200 days exposure scored 91% in cognitive skills (compared to 67% for children with under 100 days of exposure), 87% in language areas (compared to 71%), 77% in perceptual-motor skills (compared to 57%), and 80% in socio-emotional skills (compared to 74%).

MC's records further show that 63% of children who attended MC for at least 6 months improved their nutritional status, and 98% who attended for at least 2 months got up to date with immunisations.

In the coming years, MC will work to ensure institutionalisation of a policy of 'childcare at every site' which can provide holistic care to children. It will continue to raise awareness among site owners, offer training in crèche set-up and management, and work to improve access to government services for this population that often goes under the radar of official bodies.

Notes

- 1 Distress Migration: Identity and Entitlements – A Study on Migrant Construction Workers and the Health Status of their Children in the National Capital Region 2007–2008.
- 2 Accelerating Learning: An Evaluation of the Balwadi (Preschool) Programme of Mobile Crèches.

Political action for the children of seasonal migrant farm labourers in Mexico

Patricia Urbieto, Research Coordinator, and Claudia Cabrera, Assistant Child Labour Coordinator, Ririki Social Intervention, Mexico



The welfare and education centres provide food, health, dietary and care services for children, and are run by 'caregiver mothers'.
Photo • Courtesy Ririki Social Intervention

Seasonal migrant farm labourers are an impoverished, vulnerable, marginalised and largely invisible sector of the population. This article investigates the situation of such labourers – and their children – in Mexico, and the public policy solutions that have been pursued over the last two decades.

Migrant labourers, mostly from the country's poorest states, have been working Mexico's fields for centuries. Their numbers have grown since the mid-20th century, with the spread of technological progress and globalisation, and are now estimated to number over 2 million (SEDESOL, 2009). They travel as families, and it is estimated that a total of 9 million people live in the households of farm labourers; of these, an estimated 900,000 are girls and boys aged between 5 and 17 years,

working the same hours as their parents (Muñoz Ríos, 2013).

Around October and November, children leave their home states to travel with their families for a period that varies from 3 to 9 months, in an attempt to boost the family income. From as young as age 4 or 5, they work illegally as farm labourers during the sowing and harvesting seasons, or packaging products destined for the international market. Child labour sometimes brings in as much as 60% of a family's income (Romero *et al.*, 2006).

For very young girls and boys, below the age of 4 or 5 and not yet working illegally in the fields, conditions are deplorable and life expectancy is short. Their parents have no way of looking after them and no time to be with

them. In the best case scenario, it falls to another family member – sometimes a sibling who is also under the age of 5 – to look after them. Ploughed fields, exposed to the elements, become nurseries and playgrounds; sun, wind, pesticides and heavy machinery become children's worst enemies as they grow up. Generally speaking, their 'homes' are large rooms with no electricity, no ventilation and no drinking water, and with woefully inadequate sanitary arrangements.

Putting any kind of care and support in place for labourers' children is a huge challenge, as migration in Mexico is hindered by four major factors:

- 1 The migrant population is in constant movement and is always changing.
- 2 There is an enormous variety of traditions and languages.
- 3 Parents and children alike have huge gaps in their education.
- 4 There is a constant imperative to increase the family income to cover their basic needs.

These factors hinder the process of obtaining information about the boys and girls. Logistically, it is extremely difficult to get access to them in their home communities or in the farm camps to collect data. Even when access can be obtained, labourers are reluctant to describe their work situation and scared that they will be judged on their ability to care for their children. Fear and defensiveness perpetuate the hidden nature of their situation, so the cycle of marginalisation and poverty just keeps going on.

Public policy responses

There have been a number of public policy responses developed in Mexico for labourers' children, mainly focused on education, social protection, health and housing. The issue of employment protection has also been tackled over the last few years. However, much remains to be done.

Two public policy responses stand out:

- 1 the *Programa para Contribuir al Ejercicio de los Derechos de las Niñas y los Niños, Hijos de Familias Jornaleras Agrícolas*

(Programme for contributing to the exercise of the rights of farm labourers' children), which started in 2000 with the aim of creating the physical, material and environmental conditions for children aged between 0 and 6 to exercise their rights to survival, development and protection. It involves putting flexible and inclusive methods into practice in children's welfare and education centres and in playgroups.

The welfare and education centres provide food, health, dietary and care services for children, and are run by 'caregiver mothers' (IMSS, 2005), working women who are familiar with the problems facing female labourers and who, because they are appreciated by their community, have the necessary confidence to look after other people's children. In the playgroups, play is regarded as the central concept linking learning and co-existence with the cultural expression of the various ethnic groups and with gaps in education.

- 2 Coordinated by the *Programa de Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas Migrantes (PAJA)* (the Farm Workers Assistance Programme), which is run by the *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (SEDESOL)* (Social Development Department), the *Monarca* programme – aimed at children aged between 6 and 14 – sets out to prevent child labour on farms, motivate children to attend school, and ensure that children are healthy and eat well. The programme runs during the farming season in areas that attract migrant workers and in various work units, such as hostels, nurseries and camps. Focusing on vulnerable groups, it provides grants for food and subsidies for school uniforms, supports health care and monitoring for families, offers a food bank and food supplements, and also supports cultural recovery projects involving dances, songs, customs, stories and playgroups.

These public policy responses in particular have made significant progress in building integrated support for the school-age child migrant population. However, child labour has not diminished much because the low levels of economic development continue to provide strong incentives for families to put their children to work.

And there are still significant gaps in provision, which private sector and civil society groups are working in partnership with government to try to fill.

Private and civil society responses

For more than a decade, some food exporting companies have included social responsibility as part of their business structure, or they have set up foundations to help safeguard the welfare of farm labourers and their families. To do this, they have coordinated with government initiatives to direct support where it is most needed, in improving and expanding services related to education, health care, housing and diet. This is the case of the *Pro-Familia de Jornaleros* association² and the *Sabritas* Foundation³, both of which earmark resources for improving and setting up nurseries staffed by local mothers and providing care for babies and toddlers.

Social organisations have come up with schemes in support of work done by the government. The *Entornos Seguros* (Safe Environments) project – under the *Infancia en Movimiento* (Childhood in Movement) programme promoted by the *Red por los Derechos de la Infancia* (Childhood Rights Network) and the Bernard van Leer Foundation – acts mainly on behalf of children aged from 0 to 6 years old, in the communities where they are growing up. The project aims to change everyday practices involving physical violence and the risks facing young children from not having adults around, as well as building positive relationships in which diversity is respected. It also seeks to strengthen social protection networks to ensure a safer childhood.

By creating safe and inclusive family and community environments, this project uses play schemes to exercise children's right to recreation and education while at the same time fostering positive relationships between peers and adults. It pursues the following three strategies:

- 1 Travelling playgroup, *El pollito caminante* ('The walking chick'), a participative playgroup where boys and girls get information and training in subjects they enjoy and where they can voice their opinions, make suggestions and express their concerns. Families are an integral part of the playgroup.



The Safe Environments project seeks to strengthen social protection networks to ensure a safer childhood. Photo • Courtesy Ririki Social Intervention

- 2 Seed projects. Aimed at encouraging social organisations to develop projects that concentrate on rights issues and work towards reducing early childhood vulnerability.
- 3 Childhood rights seminars and intervention from a social risk management perspective. Aimed at giving professional training to people working with child labourers and especially with very young children, equipping them with the skills they need to carry out social and educational interventions with the emphasis on children's rights.

Priorities for future work

Despite the progress made by public policy, food export companies and civil society, in many cases the cycle of

marginalisation and poverty continues: children born into farm labourer families never learn to read and write, because they have to join the workforce at an early age rather than attending school, where anyway they might not have understood the language used in class; with a poor diet and inadequate access to healthcare, their prospects of a better life are further limited; and they are the future mothers and fathers of families torn apart by the need to migrate, losing more of their traditions and their sense of community with each migration.

From our experience of two decades of caring for farm labourers' children, any kind of action taken to break the cycle must be focused on a creative and innovative integrated approach, with services that take children's mobility, intercultural nature and rights into account.

Understanding the need for farm labourers to be mobile means identifying a community's conditions, demands and time constraints in terms of their work. It means being able to see how the family unit is fragmented when just one child goes with their father, with a relative or with people from their community. But it also means being able to find a way for a person to rebuild their life by joining the farming workforce in order to survive and change their living conditions. So, tackling mobility is finding a way to reach out to the population with their specific needs, which require communication and a coordinated response from the institutions involved, at set points between the places of origin, transit and destination.

Children's natural curiosity is what makes them turn to other people so that they can understand their new surroundings. This is why interculturality, characterised by ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity, is transformed into a body of knowledge and teachings aimed at bringing about social change, broadening the notion of respect for difference, and building increasingly fair and non-discriminatory societies. Children of farm labourers have the potential to grow up into multicultural citizens, into citizens of the world, without having to travel around it.

'Any kind of action taken to break the cycle must be focused on a creative and innovative integrated approach, with services that take children's mobility, intercultural nature and rights into account.'

The unequal exercise of human rights in the migrant farm labourer population needs urgent attention, but the case of young children is even more urgent. Their vulnerability reveals the vulnerability of their families as well as that of the current economic and social model that continually infringes their human rights and their right to decent living conditions.

References

- Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS). (2005). *Reglas de carácter general para la subrogación de los Servicios de Guardería con patrones y organizaciones de trabajadores eventuales de campo*. Mexico, IMSS.
- Muñoz Ríos, P. (2013). 'Más de 900 mil niños son jornaleros agrícolas', *La Jornada*, 28 August.
- Romero, S.J.R, Nava, D.P. and Samperio, D.V. (2006). *Diagnóstico sobre la Condición Social de las Niñas y Niños Migrantes Internos, Hijos de Jornaleros Agrícolas*. Mexico, UNICEF. Available at: http://www.unicef.org/mexico/spanish/mx_resources_diagnostico_ninos_jornaleros.pdf (accessed September 2013).
- Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (SEDESOL). (2009). *Encuesta Nacional de Jornaleros Agrícolas 2009*. Mexico, SEDESOL. Available at: <http://www.cipet.gob.mx/jornaleros/> (accessed September 2013).

Notes

- 1 For more information about Ririki, visit: www.ririki.org.mx
- 2 Organisation set up in early 2000 by the *Asociación de Agricultores de Río Culiacán* (AARC).
- 3 This foundation runs the Care and Development Programme for female labourers working on potato farms.

Further reading

- Cedillo Torres, S., Lara García, H., Márquez Noxpango, A., Pérez Farelas, E., Reyes Hernández, S. and Sánchezllanes Santacruz, P. (2002). Educación intercultural, una propuesta para población infantil migrante. Paper presented at *Invisibilidad y Conciencia: Migración interna de niñas y niños jornaleros agrícolas en México*, 26–27 September, Mexico. Available at: <http://www.uam.mx/cdi/pdf/eventos/invisibilidad/conafe.pdf> (accessed September 2013).
- Ramírez, N. (2008). *Apuntes Metodológicos para el Desarrollo de Intervenciones Socioeducativas*. Mexico: Indesol/Ririki Intervención Social.
- Ririki. (2008). *Estudio Diagnóstico de Acciones Dirigidas a la Población Infantil Jornalera Impulsadas por la Sedesol: Operación de Guarderías y Población Infantil Atendida por Trimestre en 2007*. Mexico: Ririki.
- Rojas Rangel, T. (2009). La crisis del sector rural y el coste migratorio en México (Crisis and rural migration cost in Mexico). *Iberoforum: Revista de Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad Iberoamericana*. IV(8): 40–81. Available at: <http://www.uia.mx/actividades/publicaciones/iberoforum/8/pdf/NOTAS%20PARA%20EL%20DEBATE/2.%20TERESA%20ROJAS%20IBEROFORUM%20NO%208.pdf> (accessed October 2013).
- Rojas Rangel, T. de J. (2011). La investigación educativa con población infantil jornalera. *Revista Académica de Investigación y Postgrado* 2(2): 135–49. Available at: <http://postgrado.upnfm.edu.hn/r2011/12.pdf> (accessed October 2013).

An interview with Dora Isabel Ochoa Aguilar

'Families must be supported': a view from the private sector



'We also send migrant women to be trained by the relevant authorities as caregivers for our nurseries – *madres cuidadoras*.' – Dora Isabel Ochoa Aguilar. Photo • Courtesy Agrícola BelHer

Dora Isabel Ochoa Aguilar is the Human Resources Manager at Agrícola BelHer¹, a company that grows tomatoes in the Mexican state of Sinaloa. In this interview, she talks to *Early Childhood Matters* about her company's efforts over the past two decades to improve living conditions for the children of the seasonal migrant workers it employs.

Tell us about the seasonal migrant workers Agrícola BelHer employs. How many are there, where do they come from, and for how long do they stay?

Last season we employed over a thousand seasonal migrants, with hundreds of children. Some are young couples with one or two children, other families are big enough to occupy two adjacent living units in our hostel complexes, which have almost 500 individual homes. We have a policy of preferring to employ workers with families, as we believe it generates more stability, both

for the company and for the family, than employing single people. We treat families well, and they come back year after year to work for us.

Our migrant workers come from various parts of Mexico, making journeys of 800–1900 km. And they may stay for up to 10 months, although it used not to be that way. When I started working for BelHer in 1990, typically workers came in October and left in April. Now that technology has enabled us to expand the growing season, workers may arrive in August and not leave until the following June. And this is a good thing for the education of their children, because in most cases it enables them to complete the school year.

So the children of the seasonal migrant workers get an education?

We are 100% committed to the children of our migrant workers having an education: from preschool to

elementary, through to middle, high and/or vocational. We work with a local NGO to monitor young children and make sure those at risk of developmental delays are referred in a timely fashion – and at the company’s expense – to private sector specialists such as neurologists, orthopaedists or ophthalmologists. Sometimes new families come to work for us with young teenagers who have never had any education, and we make sure they get adult education at an appropriate level.

I have to say that, in the beginning, it was a struggle. Parents were used to taking their children to the fields, and when we first hired a teacher, parents found it difficult to value that. However, we persevered. In 1999, we opened a kindergarten in our hostel complex, hiring teachers to work there when they were off-shift in the afternoons. In 2003, we started enrolling children in regular primary schools.

So the children of our seasonal migrants are learning Spanish and English as well as their mother tongues, learning to use computers and the internet, and having workshops in dance and drama and music, instead of staying in the fields. In fact, we now have our first two graduates among children of our migrant workers – both architects – with others currently studying subjects such as social work, nursing and business administration.

We know it is often hard for children of seasonal migrants to access public services such as education when they are living temporarily away from their home. Is this a problem for you?

It is a problem because schools need to make projections about how many children they will have to serve, and when migrant populations are unpredictable that is difficult. Not all people arrive at the same time and leave at the same time. For example, yesterday two buses with agricultural workers and their children arrived. I spoke to the schools, and they are full – they can’t take one more child. What I can do?

I’m going to find space in our complex and ask the authorities to send a teacher, but this is not what I



‘We deliver a standard monitoring tool with data on nutritional and attendance levels.’ – Dora Isabel Ochoa Aguilar. Photo • Courtesy Agrícola BelHer

want to happen. Most companies prefer to have classes on site, because it means they don’t have to pay for transport to take the children to school. But I think it is important that migrant workers’ children socialise with other children beyond their own micro-universe, children from other cultures, so that we can build mutual respect. I believe it is important for the child to have experiences outside the hostel complex where they live. As the children of our migrant workers come from different parts of Mexico, when they go to local schools it leads to a cultural exchange that is beneficial for all parties.

We have had other problems, such as migrant children not getting textbooks when policies or the people in charge changed, or report cards issued in one school not being recognised in another school. But it has always

been possible for agricultural companies to work with the schools and the authorities to sort these problems out.

In general, how is your relationship with public services and institutions?

It is very good, in part because the company's CEO is committed to social responsibility and very supportive of the community in terms of sport, cultural activities and so on. So when we constructed a new hostel complex 3 years ago, for example, we were able to work with the municipality on providing infrastructure for drinking water.

We take advantage of the various forms of support from state authorities that are available to agricultural companies, sometimes in conjunction with NGOs. For example, monthly food packages for each child attending school, and hot meals for children in kindergartens – we have to deliver a standard monitoring tool with data on nutritional and attendance levels. The doctors who run the health clinic in the hostel complex, in a space we make available, are paid by the relevant authorities, not privately by us.

We also send migrant women to be trained by the relevant authorities as caregivers for our nurseries – *madres cuidadoras*. Our policy is that caregivers have to be from children's own communities, because you can't run an early stimulation programme in Spanish if the young children do not understand Spanish.

You started working with migrant agricultural workers in 1990. How have the challenges they face changed in that time?

I have been working for BelHer since 1990, but actually it was in 1988 that I first started studying the living conditions of seasonal farm workers, for my degree in social work. Then, children were with their parents in the field. Children from 6 years old were not in school – they were working, mainly, in transplanting and cutting vegetables.

There were challenges with regard to discrimination. We've had to work hard to achieve inclusion and respect between locals and migrant groups. We promote sports

and other activities that help migrant workers to maintain their customs and cultural traditions.

Living conditions used to be much worse, with shelters made of galvanised sheets. And there were health challenges. In children under 5 there was a problem with malnutrition, with some quite severe cases of respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases. We work hard to prevent this by providing health services, monitoring children's weight and height, supplying food supplements and instructing mothers on nutrition. We make sure children have access to milk and fresh fruit.

'I've found that it is a myth that parents put their children to work because they don't want their children to go to school.'

Alcoholism has been a problem, among both men and women. Alcohol and drugs can become a hidden problem because our hostel complexes are private property, not public places where the police can patrol, and we do not believe in employing private guards to watch people – we believe they themselves should take responsibility. We organise campaigns and dialogues on alcohol and drugs, and we have observed over the years that the problem is being mitigated by children going to school. I can tell you about families in which the father used to use drugs, but with his children in high school, he has stopped. Children have become an example for adults.

You mentioned child labour: how can child labour be eliminated?

Our experience is that families must be supported. I've found that it is a myth that parents put their children to work because they don't want their children to go to school. It is simply because they want enough money to buy food. If they earn a living wage and if their children have access to education – in a safe place, with transport and food provided – then the parents have no objection to their children going to school.

The minimum age at which we hire is 16, and there are restrictions on what tasks a worker can do until the age of 18. Since 2010 we have been officially certified by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security as a company free from child labour. We were that already, even before then – we didn't have to change any of our practices to get the certificate, we only had to show the requested evidence.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation's work with young children of migrant workers focuses primarily on improving their living conditions. Tell us how young children live in the hostel complex.

Our company policy is that we will not grow an additional acre if we cannot first ensure that the people needed to work on it will have decent housing and social security, with treated water, electricity, gas for cooking, sanitation, health clinics, education services and playgrounds.

When families return to their villages at the end of the season, or move north to look for more work, we not only support them with transport if they commit to return next year, we also keep their individual living unit locked for them. No one opens it until they return, because it's their home. This gives a valuable sense of security, especially for children.

We work hard to protect workers and their young children from harmful agricultural chemicals. Every year those of our workers who deal with agrochemicals have a blood test to ensure their exposure levels are not excessive. We make sure our workers know to wear enclosed shoes and clothes that cover their bodies, and that when they finish work, their work clothes go into the washing machines and they go back home with clean clothes.

And last but not least, we also work with an NGO to make sure children get the chance to play sports. They participate in competitions with other teams from agricultural companies, and we lay on trucks to take mums and dads to away games to support them. I feel very proud to tell you that both our boys' and girls' football teams are the champions.

Note

More information about Agrícola Belher is available on their website, at: <http://www.agricolabelher.com/>

'We take advantage of the various forms of support from state authorities that are available to agricultural companies, sometimes in conjunction with NGOs.'

Children of seasonal agricultural migrant workers: an African perspective

Moussa Harouna Sambo, African Movement of Working Children and Youth, Dakar, Senegal



MJEJT discussed directly with representatives from their member organisations how seasonal migration of parents affects children.
Image • Courtesy Mouvement Africain des Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs (MJEJT)

The Mouvement Africain des Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs (MJEJT) (the African Movement of Working Children and Youth) has member organisations in 22 African countries and almost 20 years of experience in areas such as migration, protection, education and children's rights. This article provides an African perspective on the effects on children of seasonal migration.

Over the years, through various forms of research, the MJEJT have made contact with many children who have differing experiences of mobility. For example, this could be due to fostering, fleeing a crisis, voluntarily migrating alone, migrating with the family, migrating for education, employment or training, and so on. The right to be able to choose to remain in one's village,

rather than having to join an exodus in search of economic opportunities elsewhere, is one of 12 rights that were highlighted at our very first regional assembly of child and youth workers.

When the Bernard van Leer Foundation asked us to contribute an African perspective on the issue of children who migrate seasonally with their families, research into our archives showed that this is not an occurrence we have encountered frequently. The majority of seasonal migrant workers make their journeys alone, leaving their families at home. When children and adolescents migrate seasonally for work, they more commonly do so alone or in groups of friends. They often have a specific goal in mind, such as supporting their family or paying for their education

for the following year – in Agbangnizou, Benin, for example, migrant workers are called the *Houefifovi* or ‘end-of-term kids’.

Many children and young people who have migrated in search of work experience dangers and difficulties, such as employers withholding wages. Our member organisations arrange forums, direct interventions, and information campaigns concerning such risks, as well as training in how to defend oneself. They develop solidarity among children so that they help and protect each other and are better equipped to think of solutions.

Seasonal migration of parents

We discussed directly with representatives from our member organisations how seasonal migration of parents affects children. In general, as noted above, their experience is that parents tend to leave their children behind. Typically, the parents of young children are driven into seasonal work when they find they are unable to support their extra dependents. Being either young adults or still youths themselves, the majority have never migrated before. Many leave after harvest and return before the rainy season.

‘Generally, in Africa, the majority of seasonal migrant workers make their journeys alone, leaving their families at home.’

The experience of the children of these seasonal migrants depends heavily on their migrating parents’ relationship with their extended family in the village, who are left in charge of the children. If the parent is negligent or has a poor relationship with the extended family or neighbours, the child receives less supervision during the parent’s absence, with significant detrimental effects on their education and well-being.

On the other hand, if the migrant is well respected in the village and receives support from the extended family in looking after the children, these effects will



Image • Courtesy Mouvement Africain des Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs (MJEJT)

be greatly lessened – especially if the mother remains with the children and is well integrated in the extended family. Children can even benefit, if parents’ migration exposes them to new ideas about treating children with more consideration and about the importance of education.

Rather than returning every year, sometimes a husband will decide to move around for 2 or 3 years in an attempt to find better economic opportunities. If things work out he may decide to send for his wife and children. However, some end up never being heard from again. In these cases, children are often neglected, as extended families come to regard them as a burden they are no longer obliged to bear. The children may be abandoned entirely if their mother decides to divorce the father and build a new life by remarrying.

Cash transfers, information, and seasonal migration

Parental behavioural change and early cognitive development in rural Nicaragua

Karen Macours, Associate Professor, Paris School of Economics and researcher, Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA), Paris, France

Other articles in this issue of *Early Childhood Matters*, pointing to the difficult living conditions of children who migrate seasonally with their parents, raise the question: would those children be better off staying behind with extended family members? This article describes a study which examines this question, along with further efforts to explore the implications of its findings.

In many developing countries, young children suffer from profound delays in early cognitive development. This can seriously impair their success as adults, in part because investments in schooling and other dimensions of human capital will have low returns if children do not have adequate levels of cognitive and social skills before they enter school. Understanding the causes for these delays and identifying interventions that address these deficits, in the context of developing countries, are hence important priorities for research.

Potential reasons for delayed cognitive development might be children's inadequate access to nutritious foods, early stimulation or health care, or the home environment. These risk factors can in turn result from the many challenges poor households face in providing a nurturing environment for their young children, including the lack of information, financial or human resources.

What happens when a young child's parents migrate seasonally in search of work, leaving the child behind in the care of extended family members? On the one hand, the absence of one of the parents, and in particular of the mother, might be considered as an extreme case of potential lack of care that would impair early cognitive development. On the other hand, the extra money earned by the parents might improve early cognitive development by enabling the family to afford more nutritious food, health care, early stimulation materials, and so forth.

Our research in rural Nicaragua, where migration is common, looked at which of these two effects was bigger. Somewhat surprisingly, we found that in

particular the mother's seasonal migration for work has a positive effect on early cognitive development. We postulate that the increased income in the hands of mothers due to seasonal migration, and consequent additional empowerment within the household, might be responsible for offsetting the potential negative consequences of her absence for young children's cognition development (Macours and Vakis, 2010).

The potential of cash transfers

Given these results, it seemed logical to wonder if it might be possible to get the best of both worlds: what if additional resources could be put in the hands of mothers, but without the need for the mothers to migrate away?

Many Latin American countries have experimented with conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes, with a variety of specific conditions and forms of social marketing to target behavioural changes. These programmes aim to increase households' investment in their children, by giving sizeable cash transfers in return for the family agreeing to increase investments in nutrition, education and health. We conducted two evaluations in rural Nicaragua to shed light on whether such programmes could lead to sustainable gains in early childhood cognitive development.

A first piece of evidence comes from the evaluation of the long-term impacts of a 3-year cash transfer programme in Nicaragua, the *Red de Protección Social* ('Social Protection Network') (Barham *et al.*, 2013). The programme offered mothers 3 years of regular cash payments on condition that they participate in health and nutrition education sessions, their children receive regular preventive health care, and their elementary school-age children attend school. The programme was randomly offered to half of the communities in the first 3 years and the other half during the second 3 years; the differences between the two groups were evaluated, 10 years after the programme started.

Households that received the grants consumed significantly more fruits and vegetables, meat, and fats. Improved nutrition and health care due to the

programme during a child's first 1000 days of life (from the beginning of the mother's pregnancy to the age of 2) had a lasting positive impact on cognitive development, as measured by a battery of standardised cognitive tests. And the cognitive development of children who received the programme at later ages was not able to catch up entirely. The extra resources and the behavioural change were hence particularly crucial very early in a child's life.

The second piece of evidence comes from a short-term cash transfer pilot in a different area of Nicaragua (Macours *et al.*, 2012b). The *Atención a Crisis* ('Attention to Crisis') programme combined a traditional CCT, aiming to improve household health, education and nutrition, with two additional interventions that aimed at income diversification. The pilot programme, which ended in December 2006, consisted of a 1-year intervention for approximately 3000 households that had experienced a severe drought the preceding year. The women in the household were the primary participants in the programme: they received the cash transfers and were told that they were intended to improve the diversity and nutrient content of children's diets and to buy school material.

'What if additional resources could be put in the hands of mothers, but without the need for the mothers to migrate away?'

The programme had a built-in experimental structure that randomly selected households so that one-third of the families received only the cash transfer, one-third received both the cash transfer and vocational training for a young household member (usually 15–25 years old), and one-third received both the cash transfer and a lump-sum grant for productive investments in livestock or non-agricultural business activities. The goal for both of the additional activities was to provide the skills or opportunities needed for income diversification. Three rounds of data were collected (before, during and after the intervention) containing comprehensive information

on household socio-economic status, including detailed expenditure modules, extensive information on child health and nutrition, and an extensive set of tests to measure of the cognitive development of the children.

We found that the programme had positive effects on individual child health and development in beneficiary households. In particular, the results for language, short-term memory, and social–personal skills were strong in both follow-up surveys, conducted in 2006 (9 months after the households began receiving payments) and 2008 (2 years after households had stopped receiving benefits). The magnitude of the impact is similar in 2006 and 2008, showing that there was no fade-out of programme effects 2 years after the programme ended.

Cash or information?

In 2008, the households that received the lump-sum grant continued to have higher per capita expenditures than those in the control group. This allowed us to analyse whether this longer-term higher expenditure resulted in more improvements in childhood outcomes. We found that it did not: despite the increased income, no differences in developmental outcomes occurred between the groups. The results further demonstrated that the lump sum treatment did not have any obvious negative effects on the amount or quality of the time that mothers spent with their children. These results suggest that something other than, or in addition to, the direct cash transfer must have contributed to the changes in early childhood outcomes.

Indeed, the results show that the *Atención a Crisis* programme did have a substantial effect on the use of various inputs into child development. In 2006, households randomly assigned to the programme changed the composition of their food expenditure, spending a lower fraction on staples, and higher fractions on animal proteins, fruits and vegetables; households in the intervention group had substantial increases in various measures of child stimulation – they were more likely to tell stories, sing to, or read to their children, and to have pen, paper and toys for children in the house; their children were also more likely to

have been weighed, given iron, vitamins or deworming medicine, and to have spent fewer days in bed.

Furthermore, in 2008 the households assigned to receive only the basic treatment did not have higher expenditures than those in the control group, yet these households continued to show significant differences in these early childhood investments. These effects cannot easily be explained by the earlier cash transfers. Rather, they suggest that the *Atención a Crisis* programme had an effect on behaviour even 2 years after the programme had been discontinued.

This, in turn, can help explain why programme impacts were sustained 2 years after the programme ended. The lack of fade-out stands in contrast with evaluations of a number of interventions in both developed and developing countries. Indeed, many other interventions, whether nutritional supplements or centre-based interventions, only target the child directly. The fact that fade-out of impacts appears to occur for many early childhood programmes, but not for *Atención a Crisis*, suggests that the behavioural changes made by parents might be important in obtaining lasting gains in childhood development.

Can information alone work?

If changes in parental investment behaviour through information directed towards mothers were important to understand the impact of the CCTs, what then is the potential of intensive interventions providing information only, and not cash? And does the impact of such information interventions differ depending on whether they target mothers or fathers in the households? We set out to investigate these questions in a context where seasonal migration constitutes an important part of the livelihood of poor households.

The question about fathers is especially pertinent, as early childhood interventions typically target mothers, but in poor rural households in developing countries it might often be the fathers who manage most financial resources and make decisions on possible investments in early childhood. And while mothers might possibly

spend more time with their children, important gains could be obtained from increasing fathers' involvement and interactions. This might be particularly relevant in the context we study in Nicaragua, where fathers – and to a lesser extent mothers – frequently migrate for work. This may bring in the needed financial resources, but at the same time it causes fathers to be absent from the daily lives of their young children for long stretches of time. Does increasing awareness of good early childhood practices in such a context increase their investment in their young children?

Two pilot interventions were designed to analyse these questions. The first intervention relied on home visits by trained educators, who visited young children's homes on a regular basis to teach parents about good parenting practices, focusing on play, praise and a caring home environment, and including messages on nutrition and hygiene (Macours *et al.*, 2012a). In a random subset of villages they worked only with mothers and their children, while in the other randomly selected subset, they tried to actively engage the fathers.

Engaging the fathers, not surprisingly, was challenging, given their frequent absences from the home. Nevertheless, the results show that interventions that included the fathers were more effective in increasing early childhood cognitive and socio-emotional skills, and this was especially strong for boys. The evidence also shows that the intervention changed knowledge and attitudes regarding early childhood practices, motivated parents and children to engage in more joint activities, led to less physical punishment and more praise, and improved nutrition practices. In terms of magnitude, the impact on cognitive and socio-emotional skills of this information intervention achieved impacts similar to those of the CCT programme.

A second pilot intervention, currently in the planning phase, will investigate whether providing information about parenting practices to mothers and fathers of young children can also be effective when sent through daily text messages. The text message approach has the

potential advantage of reaching mothers and fathers on a daily basis, including when they are away from home due to seasonal migration, and is obviously substantially cheaper than home visiting by educators. On the other hand, it might be harder to obtain behavioural change without the direct human contact of the educators in the earlier intervention.

'Results show that interventions that included the fathers were more effective in increasing early childhood cognitive and socio-emotional skills, and this was especially strong for boys.'

We are therefore planning to set up a randomised evaluation to analyse these questions carefully, in which we will randomly target mothers, fathers, or both, and will also vary the type of messages that will be sent. The intervention will take place in part in the same population as the previous ones, so that we can analyse to what extent the text messages work better when they serve as reminders for behavioural messages to which households have been exposed earlier, or whether they can also be effective in absence of previous interventions. This then will help test whether information technology can be effective in shifting parental investments.

Importantly, it will also help understand whether such an intervention can help reach migrant parents, who might not often be at home, but whose investment decisions might possibly be equally important for the development of their young children. There is also obvious potential for further pilot studies to be designed, in the light of our findings, which address seasonal migrants who take their children with them. Overall, we hope to contribute to an increased understanding of the most effective policy options to safeguard the early cognitive development of young children whose parents face economic pressure to migrate seasonally in search of work.

References

- Barham, T., Macours, K. and Maluccio, J. (2013). Boys' cognitive skill formation and physical growth: long-term experimental evidence on critical ages for early childhood interventions. *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings* 103(3): 467–71.
- Macours, K., Premand, P., Schady, N. and Vakis, R. (2012a). Experimental evidence from an early childhood parenting intervention in Nicaragua. Conference presentation at *Promises for Preschoolers: Early Childhood Development and Human Capital Accumulation*, 25–26 June, University College London.
- Macours, K., Schady, N. and Vakis, R. (2012b). Cash transfers, behavioral changes, and cognitive development in early childhood: evidence from a randomized experiment. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 4(2): 247–73.
- Macours, K. and Vakis, R. (2010). Seasonal migration and early childhood development. *World Development* 38(6): 857–69.

Investing in the development of young children

The Bernard van Leer Foundation funds and shares knowledge about work in early childhood development. The Foundation was established in 1949 and is based in the Netherlands. Our income is derived from the sale of Royal Packaging Industries van Leer N.V., bequeathed to the Foundation by Dutch industrialist and philanthropist Bernard van Leer (1883 to 1958).

Our mission is to improve opportunities for children up to age 8 who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. We see this both as a valuable end in itself and as a long-term means of promoting more cohesive, considerate and creative societies with equal opportunities and rights for all. We work primarily by supporting programmes implemented by local partners. These include public, private and community-based organisations. Working through partnerships is intended to build local capacity, promote innovation and flexibility, and help to ensure that the work we fund is culturally and contextually appropriate.

We also aim to leverage our impact by working with influential allies to advocate for young children. Our free publications share lessons we have learned from our own grantmaking activities and feature agenda-setting contributions from outside experts. Through our publications and advocacy, we aim to inform and influence policy and practice not only in the countries where we operate but globally.

In our current strategic plan, we are pursuing three programme goals: reducing violence in young children's lives, taking quality early education to scale, and improving young children's physical environments. We are pursuing these goals in eight countries – Peru, India, the Netherlands, Israel, Uganda, Turkey, Brazil and Tanzania – as well as undertaking a regional approach within the European Union.



**Bernard
van Leer**
FOUNDATION