



ACP OBSERVATORY ON MIGRATION
OBSERVATOIRE ACP SUR LES MIGRATIONS
OBSERVATÓRIO ACP DAS MIGRAÇÕES

The migration of children in ACP countries: *Of their own free will or involuntary?*



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ACP Observatory on Migration

The ACP Observatory on Migration is an initiative of the Secretariat of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States, funded by the European Union, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in a Consortium with 15 partners and with the financial support of Switzerland, IOM, the IOM Development Fund and UNFPA. Established in 2010, the ACP Observatory is an institution designed to produce data on South-South ACP migration for migrants, civil society and policymakers and enhance research capacities in ACP countries for the improvement of the situation of migrants and the strengthening of the migration–development nexus.

The Observatory was established to facilitate the creation of a network of research institutions and experts on migration research. Activities are starting in 12 pilot countries and will be progressively extended to other interested ACP countries. The 12 pilot countries are: Angola, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Kenya, Lesotho, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Republic of Tanzania.

The Observatory has launched research and capacity-building activities on South-South migration and development issues. Through these activities, the ACP Observatory aims to address many issues that are becoming increasingly important for the ACP Group as part of the migration-development nexus. Documents and other research outputs and capacity-building manuals can be accessed and downloaded free of charge through the Observatory's website (www.acpmigration-obs.org). Other upcoming publications and information on the Observatory's activities will be posted online.

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**The migration of children in
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The question of child migration has been of interest to researchers and public decision makers for many years. However, far from being new, the phenomenon is not in general studied in its entirety. Part of this vast subject is, in fact, a subject of discussion, namely the exploitation, abuse and trafficking of children; these being considered as **vulnerable dependents and not as leading actors in their migratory journey.**

However, the lack of information concerning the characteristics of migrant children is a major gap in the understanding of the subject. Although no precise figures are known concerning child migration, UN DESA estimated in 2011 that 33 million international migrants were **under 19 years of age**, thus representing 15 per cent of all international migrants (UN DESA, 2011). When it comes to geographic distribution, young people represent a larger group of migrants in developing countries than in the countries of the North (MacKenzie, 2006). In 2010, **one quarter of migrants in the South were under 20 years of age**, 10 per cent higher than the world average (UN DESA, 2011). **The proportion of young migrants is particularly high in Africa (28%). These data tell us about the urgent need to increase the political attention that is paid to young migrants in countries in the South.**

Child, definition given by Article 1 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child:

'A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.'

The lack of information concerning the general trends of child migration, as well as the impacts it can have on children, affects decision-making at all levels and endangers children's rights and futures. **It is therefore becoming urgent to take the diversity of situations through which children can be affected by migration into consideration**, in order to reflect, in a more comprehensive manner, on possible solutions.

This report will thus consider the **dynamics of child migration** and the impacts it can have both on children migrating alone and with their families, as well as on those who remain in the country, those born in the country of destination and those who return to their country of origin.

1. Definition and observations

Before going further, it seems necessary to explain a few definitions, in order to clarify the key concepts that will be used subsequently.

Children/minors

The definition used in this report will be the one given by Article 1 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child¹. This states that:

'A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.'

This definition remains open to discussion, given that the vision that emerges does not appear to match the view that many communities hold concerning childhood. It seems more plausible to maintain that **the concept of childhood varies according to the social, cultural, historic, religious and rational norms that govern a given community, given that the place of children is not the same in each of them.**

Categorization of children affected by migration

Children may be affected by migration in a number of ways, and its impacts will be different depending on their particular situations. For ease of comprehension, **this report will deal more specifically with four categories of children:**

1. Children migrating with their parents, members of their family or relatives;
2. Unaccompanied migrant children;
3. Children of migrants remaining in their country of origin;
4. Children born to migrant parents in their country of destination.

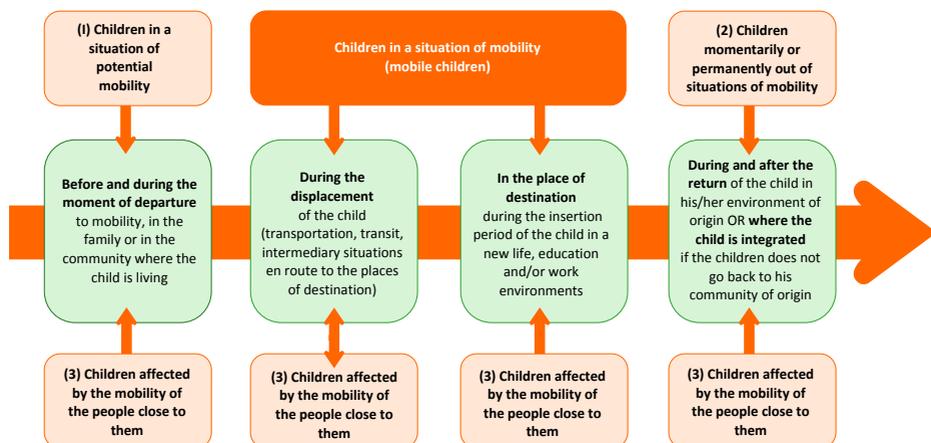
Concept of 'mobile children'

The child welfare organization Terre des Hommes refers to **'mobile children'** when summarizing the various situations in which a child may be affected by migration. This concept refers to **the displacement of children between different geographic and social spaces, as well as these children's experiences during their movements** (see graph). It helps with an understanding of how a migratory experience, of any type, may transform their identity and conditions of existence.²

1 Convention adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989.

2 A relevant comment made by the Terre des Hommes organization: 'It is important not to objectify each profile. (...). The significance of this categorization is not to lose sight either of the variety

What protection is there for children affected by mobility in West Africa?



Source: *TdHIF, 2012.*

Main factors of migration: passive children or children at the heart of the migratory process?

If children can effectively be part of the migratory decision-making process, what are the main factors that can influence their choice? A multitude of factors can be cited. **An economic and social opportunity envisaged by the child itself or by its family should be considered in the first instance.** Work is, in fact, the main reason that leads to them migrating. However, more cultural rites, such as the transition into adulthood, must also be taken into account (Jeffrey and McDowell, 2004; Punch, 2007). In some societies, such as in the Caribbean, children are even considered to be the most mobile actors (Fog Olwig, 2002, 2012). **Their movements are then experienced as a real cultural tradition.**

Regional differences must also be noted when talking about child migration due to specific cultural and social aspects. Consequently, children and adolescents form the largest group of migrants in Africa. In fact, they represent half of the international migrants in the region. In Latin America and in the Caribbean, they represent 18 per cent (Cortina and Hovy, 2009).

of links between childhood and mobility, or of the need to work upstream and downstream of situations of mobility, in several places and times during a child's life.'

2. Children and migration: a future in development

It is difficult to generalize about, or even categorize, the experiences of the millions of children affected, directly or indirectly, by migration. However, this is needed for an overall understanding of the phenomenon. The study of the impact of migration on children will therefore be divided into four distinct categories.

'My mother sent me to look for tomatoes, and it started to rain so I couldn't get home. (This lady) told me that she loved me and gave me gifts. So I decided I wanted to stay there'
Fog Olwig, 2012: 938

a. **Unaccompanied migrant children: exploitation or 'chosen' migration?**

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that in 2009, 215 million (ILO, 2010) boys and girls worldwide were subjected to child labour according to the definitions of the ILO's Convention 138 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children.³

However, **special situations are not so simple to identify. In many communities, it is considered normal for children to work and help their families meet their needs.** The children themselves then see their work as contributing to family life. When a family agrees by mutual consent, responsibilities assigned to children may lead them to migrate.

Fostering or the de facto migration of children in West Africa

Fostering is a common custom there, whereby children, mainly girls, are sent to live with members of their family living some distance away. **Children therefore migrate for the purpose of helping with tasks in the host family** (HRW, 2007). This practice is seen as normal and socially acceptable, and is not considered as child labour but as necessary support in countries where protection and insurance systems do not exist. However, this social norm leads to numerous situations of exploitation and abuse that parents often cannot imagine. The same system exists in different parts of the world, such as in Haiti with the *Restavek*.⁴

3 According to Article 1 of this convention, 'a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier'.

4 Restavek: children sent by their parents to live with other members of their family or individuals having no family relationship with them in order to help with domestic work. (Sommerfelt, 2002; Hoffmann, 2012).

The foundation of a cultural tradition of migration: example of child mobility in the Caribbean

As Karen Fog Olwig (2012) stresses, child mobility in the Caribbean is an important foundation of the migratory tradition, itself being an integral aspect of most societies in this region. In fact, while Caribbean children generally grow up in family homes, this does not necessarily mean that they live with their own parents. However, **Caribbean children can enter different social spheres more easily than their parents, due to their submission to adult authority.**

Migration of children is an integral component of Caribbean societies, far from the western clichés concerning the latter. Children are thus seen as real social actors contributing to the informal ‘care chain’ prevalent in this region.

The benefits of child migration

The extent to which migration is a positive or negative experience depends on a wide range of different factors according to the context, the people encountered and according to the various points on the journey (Punch, 2009). Although situations of exploitation should not be underestimated, **consideration should also be given to the benefits children may derive from migration**, including better education or training, better economic and social opportunities and better access to health services (Dottridge, 2011). The Asociación Grupo de Trabajo Redes (2004) surveyed migrant children that had become domestic servants in three Peruvian cities (Lima, Cajamarca and Pucallpa), and most of them referred to positive situations in which they were treated with ‘affection, patience and love’ by their employers (Testimony of Milulka, age 15, in May 2004; AGTR, 2004, p.27). What they had learned was particularly valued, and some even stressed the opportunities and amenities to which they had access due to living and working in an urban area.

The main risks associated with the migration of unaccompanied children: the specific case of trafficking and statelessness

Smuggling and trafficking of children

The trafficking of children, in the same way as that of adults, is a subject that occupies international organizations, governments and numerous non-governmental organizations throughout the world, due both to its magnitude and its dramatic consequences. However, although of tremendous interest, **official figures are very difficult to come by**, due to the clandestine nature of smuggling and trafficking in general. In 2002, the ILO estimated that 1.2 million children were subject to trafficking; with this figure including both

internal trafficking and international trafficking (ILO, 2002). In its report, the ILO also set out a geographic representation that is useful in understanding the extent of the phenomenon in countries in the South:

Regional representation of child victims of trafficking

Region (of origin)	Trafficked children
Asia Pacific	250,000
Latin America and the Caribbean	550,000
Africa	200,000
Transition economies	200,000
Developped, industrialized economies	Not available
Total (rounded)	1,200,000

Source: ILO, UNICEF, UN.GIFT. Book 1, Training manual on the fight against the trafficking of children for the purpose of exploitation of their labour, sexual and other forms of exploitation.

Today it is estimated that 2.5 million people are victims of trafficking, 22 to 50 per cent of whom are children (ILO, 2005). Beyond a general lack of figures, studies published on the subject unfortunately only give an often all too vague overview of the situation, focusing as they do on one aspect or on one particular region (Bastia, 2005).

Child trafficking is considered to be one of the worst forms of child labour according to the ILO’s Convention no. 182, 1999. However, this struggle, once again based on a western-centric definition, must not prevent the social and cultural aspects of child migration from being taken into account. In fact, the smuggling and trafficking of children is part of the general context of population movements, often for economic reasons, and their boundaries are sometimes difficult to identify.

For further information on this subject, the first background note published by the ACP Observatory is specially dedicated to human trafficking in sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.⁵

⁵ Information that can be consulted directly on the website of the ACP Observatory for migration: <http://www.acpmigration-obs.org/sites/default/files/EN-BN01-trafficking.pdf>.

Statelessness

A stateless person is considered to be ‘a person not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law’ according to Article 1 of the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons⁶, which is the main international legal instrument established for the protection of stateless persons.

However, **the acquisition or non-acquisition of a nationality is essential for all human beings** as it gives access to rights, as well as an identity. For example, children, in addition to not having access to basic services such as health care, may be confronted with discrimination or social exclusion due to their lack of nationality. However, the main problem is the fact that these children, without any official papers, have no proof of their status as minors.

b. Children remaining in their country of origin

In most cases of economic migration, only those capable of working are designated for migration by their families; the idea being to return most of the funds raised to the family that remains in the country, and therefore to spend as little as possible. For certain families, the underlying idea is therefore to obtain sufficient funds before returning and, for example, starting a local business in the country of origin. In these conditions, and due to the many restrictions on immigration that make any such attempt complex, migrant parents may decide not to take their children with them. The latter are then often entrusted to other members of the family. The consequences of such a situation, which differ according to personal circumstances, depend primarily on the duration of the parents’ migration (Castañeda and Busk, 2011).

The positive impacts of money transfers

When a migratory plan actually leads to funds being sent, **it is important to consider the positive impacts this has on the family remaining in the country.** The most significant impacts that can be expected with regard to children are access to education and a reduction in the education gap between genders, a reduction in child labour and, above all, a general improvement in their health. Transfers of funds are, in fact, most often used to meet basic subsistence needs and improve living conditions (IOM, 2006).

‘I miss my father, mother and sister. I wonder why they don’t live with my grandparents and me. I want to grow up quickly so I can live with them.’

Interview with a migrant child; Liu and Zhu, 2011: 457

⁶ UNHCR, Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, adopted on 28 September 1954, which came into force on 6 June 1960.

In Mexico, a study shows that children from families receiving transfers of funds complete between 0.7 and 1.6 more years of school than children from families that do not have a family member living in a foreign country. It has also been found that an increase in the number of families receiving funds in a town leads to a better level of health and schooling (Duryea et al., 2005). However, this relationship is not always confirmed, and depends on the family's choices.

Variable living conditions according to the situation of the people responsible for the children

Away from their parents, the role of the people looking after the children becomes fundamental for their development. However, these appointed 'guardians' do not always have the resources to accommodate an extra person in their home, and remain social and economic actors who, for the most part, do not have the necessary time and resources to devote to them. **Children are therefore often neglected**, mistreated and even abused by the people supposed to be protecting them and looking after their development in the place of their parents. This is what some people call the *Cinderella Syndrome* (Archambault and de Laat, 2009).

Psychological aspects: an undeniable loss of reference points and a family relationship under tension

While many studies look at the economic aspects of migration, it seems worthwhile to look at the issue of the psychological costs that family separation may cause.

While parents who migrate consider that the funds they send their family are a means for them to remain in contact, children separated from their parents are more concerned about the lack of emotional resources they experience on a daily basis. From the child's point of view, **separation is, in fact, perceived as abandonment, regardless of the reasons or circumstances that have led to it**. A UNICEF report thus indicates that children separated from their parents due to migration are twice as likely as other children to experience psychological problems, even though their economic situation is more advantageous. The main psychological problems are a feeling of abandonment, sadness, discouragement and even despair, anger and lack of self-confidence, which can sometimes turn into violent behaviour (UNICEF, 2011).

As Grinberg and Grinberg (1984) summarize it, **families often pay for the transfer of funds with the psychological trauma generated by migration and family separation**.

c. Children migrating with their family

The migration of children with one or both of their parents is an interesting aspect which has nevertheless not been studied sufficiently, since the child is considered to be protected from the numerous risks that migration may involve by its family. However, although this type of migration is often idealized by a description of children in better health and working hard at school, this observation is not always verified and, once more, depends on the context surrounding the migratory process. **Two categories in particular need to be differentiated, namely the children of legal migrants and those of illegal migrants.** The former, although subject to many forms of discrimination, in principle have unrestricted access to basic services and therefore to better opportunities. The latter live a life that is more closed in on themselves and their family, imitating their parents' behaviour due to their feeling of permanent insecurity. Two themes will be emphasized in this report, namely the place given to education in the country of destination and the question of acculturation for children who have experienced two cultures before their adolescence.

Education: a priority for the family

Many studies focus on the academic success of migrant children. These refer to children who, in general, arrive with a strong will to succeed, but this view obscures the day-to-day lives of many of them in public schools that are often overcrowded, sometimes violent and where their integration takes place at the cost of numerous obstacles such as the language barrier, segregation, etc.

'You have everything. Beautiful clothes, smart trainers... ...I would sell everything for my mother, you never receive a mother's love from anyone else.'

Interview with a migrant child; Nazario, 2006: xii

The migration of children with their parents is considered in itself as a family investment, through the opportunity of a better education, which is the main route to the future economic success of the second generation. This idea is mostly associated with North-South migration. However, it should be noted that such scenarios may also be taken into account in the context of urban migration.

The attitude of parents with regard to their children's success therefore appears to be crucial. Regional variations need to be considered at this point. Several studies have, in fact, shown that parents of Asian origin attach more importance to educational outcomes than their counterparts in Latin America (Kao and Tienda, 1995; Fuligni, 1997).

To these differences must be added the involvement or non-involvement of parents in their children's education. This is a key point, and one that is affected by the long hours the parents spend at work and during which children are left unsupervised (Cooper et al., 1999; Phelan et al., 1993; Suárez-Orozco et Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

In addition, it should not be forgotten that migration must also benefit those remaining in the country. If the gains made by parents do not live up to expectations, children will find themselves required to participate in 'family duties', thus becoming economic actors themselves.

Assimilation or rejection: a choice between several cultures

Acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological change that occurs following intercultural contact (Berry, 2003). **It is a phenomenon that has been subject to a great deal of study during migrations**, given that it modifies a group's normal relationships, as well as the attitude of individuals in relation to their cultural identity (Phinney, 2003). It is of even more significance for children, since it changes their individual behaviour at an age when they are forming an integrated identity (Erikson, 1980).

However, **the long-term consequences of the process of acculturation are extremely diverse, and depend on social and personal variables that relate as much to the original society as they do to the host society** (Berry, 1997). Four acculturation strategies are used by any individual, depending on the desire they have to maintain their cultural heritage and identity and to become involved in the society as a whole (Berry et al., 2006), i.e. assimilation⁷, separation⁸, marginalization⁹ and integration¹⁰. The results of the Berry, Phinney, Sam, Vedder study (2006) involving 7,997 adolescents aged between 13 and 18 (5,366 of whom were first and second generation immigrants) in thirteen developed countries¹¹ are interesting to analyse in terms of culture and acculturation, despite the fact that the study did not directly concern South-South migration. **What should be learned from this study** is that the ethnic environment in which a child finds itself plays a significant part in the way in which children master the cultures with which they are in contact.

7 Assimilation tallies with a low interest in maintaining a link with their own culture, combined with a preference for interaction with the destination society.

8 Separation is expressed by a desire to maintain their own culture by limiting contact with others.

9 Marginalization exists when contact with the original culture is not maintained, nor is there any desire to interact with others.

10 Integration can be summarized both by the two cultures being maintained and a desire to integrate into society as a whole.

11 Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom, USA.

d. Children returning to their country of origin: a difficult experience

The problems encountered by children returning to their parents' country of origin is one of the least studied aspects of child migration. However, **this is becoming a social phenomenon of great importance in many countries in the South**, especially as a result of the economic crisis that began in 2007 and the general return of many economic migrants. The information provided in this part mainly comes from two studies found on this subject: one describing the experience of Chinese children returning to rural areas (Liu and Zhu, 2011) and the other focusing on the more specific case of refugee children repatriated to their country of origin (Malawi) after the conflicts ended (Cornish et al., 1999).

Second generation migrants: difficult reintegration

Just as we have seen when a child migrates to a destination country, the key problem faced by a child returning to its country of origin (or that of its parents) is that of its integration into a society, **the customs of which appear strange to it, and even foreign for children born in another country** or who don't remember anything about their country of origin because they left it when they were still very young. They encounter a variety of circumstances involving readaptation depending on the length of their migration, the reasons that caused them to leave, the cultural and social differences between the areas of residence and whether or not they are accompanied by their parents (Donna and Berry, 1999). Consequently, for example, children born in the country of destination or who have spent a large part of their childhood there show greater reluctance to adapt to their new environment (survey conducted by Liu and Zhu, 2011).

Returning may be even more difficult for refugees repatriated to their country of origin. Rogge (1994) also emphasizes the fact that **repatriation is an experience that is as stressful as fleeing from this country, even for the second generation born in the country of refuge, who sometimes find that their new 'home' is a strange, even frightening, place**. It is important to take this aspect into account in the context of South-South migration, since the vast majority of migratory journeys that take place there are forced.

However, it is important to note that returning to the country of origin may also be the result of the child having suffered a bad experience during its migration, or not having adapted to the promised life. In this case, returning is essential for their well-being. This is often also the case for unaccompanied migrant children, due to their feeling of security when they return to their family.

Representation of the country of birth at the heart of the identity question

The results of the Cornish, Peltzer and MacLachlan survey (1999) show that the majority of the children who took refuge in Zambia and who returned to Malawi either changed their group identity, considering themselves to be Malawians once they arrived in the country, or were not sure of their own identity. As one of the children interviewed said: 'I am a Malawian because I am here but I still feel Zambian because I was born there' (Cornish et al., 1999, p.274). These results thus prove that **children returning to their country/village of origin experience ambiguous and stressful acculturation with regard to their own identity**. Above and beyond the family cocoon, the role of the reception and support structures once children have returned to the county must not therefore be underestimated.

3. Conclusion: the impact of the children migration study for a better understanding of adult migration

The challenge of this report was to demonstrate the scale of the impacts that child migration can have in countries in the South, but also to understand the main themes of this in order to provide a better response to the needs of this particular category of migrants. Paying attention to the reasons and factors driving migration thus becomes an essential issue in realizing that, putting aside western-centric prejudices, this type of migration may be perceived as necessary, even socially recognized, in societies where intergenerational support, for example, plays a leading role.

The issue to be addressed is why we should pay attention to child migration? The answer is **because it is a social phenomenon of increasing magnitude that has impacts on human development** on the one hand, and on the other hand because the presuppositions concerning this issue do not describe the complexity of the situation. Therefore, it is difficult to supervise it correctly so that everyone can profit from the many benefits it can deliver.

In addition, **it is important to consider the issue from a longer-term viewpoint**, bearing in mind that migrant children's experiences have an effect on their way of interacting with society throughout their lives. Consequently, it is not only because **the children of today are the adults of tomorrow** that it is important to consider them, but also because, in addition to being 'beings in the making' (Holloway and Valentine, 2000), they are active agents, inventing their culture and their relationship with society rather than learning those of others (Hirschfeld, 2002).

4. Recommendations and good practices

4.1 Data collection: integrating children as actors in their own situation

-  Generally speaking, **there is a lack of data concerning the impact that migration can have on children according to the different circumstances they experience.** It has been particularly difficult in this report to find data about migrant children returning to their countries of origin, bearing in mind that existing data generally only focus on the ‘second generation’ migrants who return ‘to the country’.
-  The **active participation of migrant children** is essential for collecting data, but also for the legislation in place concerning them. It is time to consider children as full economic, social and cultural agents, with their own agenda and prospects (Anderson, 1999; Hirschfeld, 2002).

4.2 International protection relating to the well-being of the child and family

-  **Each responsible State needs to ratify all the international conventions** that refer to the rights of children and the family, as well as those relating to migrants’ rights, and to promote their effective implementation at national level.
-  Legislators must consider **the special needs of migrant and returning children who, on the one hand, have the same rights as any other child according to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child**, and, on the other hand, are affected, directly or indirectly, by the migratory process, giving them special rights that need to be taken into account urgently (Terre des Hommes, 2011).
-  The fight against child smuggling and trafficking must, above all, be a national priority. To achieve this, the media, researchers and activists from a variety of associations must cooperate, for example by organizing training sessions or discussion forums.
-  **Family unification must be ensured** so as not to compromise the benefits of migration. When reunification is impossible due to migration, additional policies or transnational programmes must be set up in order to overcome the constraints of separation.
-  The authorities responsible for **child protection must review the core of their system:** The best interest of the child; ethical, legal and social basis for all policies or decisions affecting children (Kopelman, 1997). The main questions remain: who determines the child’s best interest and how? And, above all, how can this best interest interact with the child’s right to express its wishes?

 Education must be promoted for all: it is the first step towards social advancement and promises better opportunities in numerous domains such as health, equality between sexes or democratization (UNESCO, 2009).

4.3 Promoting regional cooperation

 Given the importance of South-South migration, in particular intraregional migration, **it is urgent to regionalize policies linked to immigration.** Agreements could, for example, be reached concerning the reception and training of foreign labour or insertion programmes could be contemplated in towns and regions where there is a high level of immigration.

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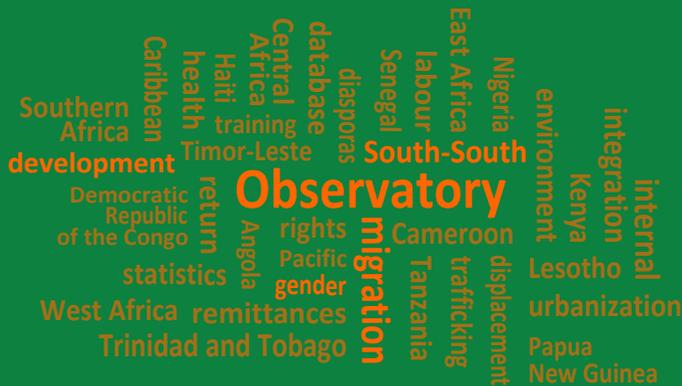
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