Migrant Youth and Children of Migrants in a Globalized World: Proposal for an International Research Network

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Introduction

International migration has been rising over time in response to global economic and political integration. Although only about 3 percent of the world’s 6.8 billion inhabitants resided in countries outside their birthplace in 2009, the impact of population movement is highly uneven.¹ Today between 9 and 10 percent of the population living in developed regions is foreign-born compared with a meager 1.3 percent in developing regions. Moreover, the size and composition of the flows has changed in recent years, with women and children comprising larger shares. Unlike the feminization of migration, which has been amply documented since the mid 1980s, there has been scant attention to children’s involvement in international migration and its consequences for their psychosocial, physical and economic wellbeing. Youth were missing from the agenda of the first meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (2007), which claims to have shifted a policy paradigm by moving development to the center of the migration debate.

These new migration trends are socially and politically significant not only because they are occurring against the backdrop of an unprecedented demographic divide—an aging industrialized world and a youthful developing world—and because there is mounting anti-immigrant sentiment in the major receiving regions. Industrialized nations need young migrants to replenish their aging labor force; developing countries also need the talents of their most skilled youth to meet the challenges of economic growth in ever more competitive, globally integrated capital and labor markets.

Human migration is a powerful correlate of economic development that incurs costs and benefits for both sending and receiving countries, and for the migrants themselves. Immigrant-receiving countries are interested in harnessing the benefits from migration of young people, and migrant-sending countries seek to maximize social and economic impacts of remittances. The infusion of young migrants represents a potential demographic dividend that can be garnered by destination communities through human capital investments and strong integration policies; earlier investments generate higher returns. For migration flows to be economically efficient, however, requires strong integration policies that allow industrialized nations to harness the demographic dividend afforded by the influx of young people and their offspring. To ensure that young people with migration backgrounds acquire skills for managing risks, exercising their

¹ The UN defines international migrants as persons who reside outside of their country of origin for one year or more. As of 2010 the UN estimate is approximately 214 million; the world population estimate for 2009 is 6.8 billion.
creative talents, and becoming productive citizens, investments in their social development and physical wellbeing are essential. Unfortunately, heightened emphasis on regulation of migration (border control) and remittances has deflected attention from myriad opportunities to capitalize on migration of young people, which requires creating conditions that benefit migrants and ideally, their origin and destination communities as well.

That growing numbers of children and youth are being impacted by international migration is clear enough, but whether and how migration improves or diminishes the life chances of children and youth is poorly understood because research about the consequences of migration is highly fragmented by place, method and substance; because studies of child wellbeing and migration operate in separate spheres; and because there is relatively little empirical evidence that systematically compares child and youth outcomes across diverse contexts of reception. Most research focused on young people with migration backgrounds consists of country-specific studies that may not be readily generalized, but there is growing evidence that children and youth with migration backgrounds fare less well than their host-country counterparts. Contexts of immigrant reception vary greatly across countries and also change over time as the volume and composition of immigrant flows evolves, with profound consequences for child wellbeing that remain poorly understood.

**International Child Migration Research Network**

A background paper prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation by one of the principal investigators identified three barriers limiting the expansion of research about migration and development to children and youth: (1) the absence of an integrated analytical framework that depicting how migration enhances or undermines normative development of children and youth; (2) the lack of networks connecting migration research and policy communities with those interested in children and youth; and (3) the paucity of data for comparative and dynamic analysis. Progress toward the first barrier has been made through two international seminars—one sponsored in Bellagio (spring, 2008) under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation and another at Princeton (summer, 2009) with support from PIIRS. These activities have positioned the investigators to address the second and third barriers, for which we propose to organize an international child migration research network.

The proposed network will convene interdisciplinary teams of researchers from four research hubs with the overarching goal of fostering cross-national comparative research about wellbeing of children and youth with migration backgrounds. More generally we propose to merge two fields that seldom intersect: migration and development on the one hand (which has been dominated by a focus on remittances and employment in sending and receiving countries, respectively) and child development and wellbeing on the other (currently the purview of social psychology and rarely considers migration status). Systematic comparative research that examines the institutional, economic, and social arrangements that define contexts of reception for child migrants will draw on multiple data sources, some of which are in the public domain and some of which require collaboration.
Research Themes

The growing presence of children and youth among migrant populations raises two important research and policy questions bearing directly on wellbeing of young people with migration backgrounds. First, how does migration influence wellbeing of children and youth; second, how are migrant children and youth faring in their host countries? Although related, these questions differ in more than semantic ways, and their policy implications differ as well.

The former asks how young people who migrate differ from similarly situated youth in their origin countries that do not migrate. Importantly, the answer requires an understanding of the selection regimes that produce migratory flows of children and youth as well as the forces that influence particular types moves, i.e., whether moves are voluntary or tied to adults, and whether international moves are authorized. Essentially, this question seeks to clarify whether migration improves or undermines wellbeing of young people, depending on its character, timing, duration, and auspices.

The second question, which is most relevant for host countries, takes as given the migration decision and asks, instead, how migrant children compare with nonimmigrant children in their host communities on various dimensions of physical, social, and economic wellbeing. For example, do migrant youth close education gaps with their nonimmigrant counterparts as they master their host country language, or are they marginalized from mainstream institutions and denied opportunities for social integration? Do migrant and nonimmigrant youth differ in their health status, and if so, are these differences transitory? How much time is required for convergence in psychosocial and economic wellbeing of native and migrant youth? Although the auspices of migration are also important for addressing this question, the migration decision per se is of secondary importance. Answers to this question should identify for policy makers what aspects of integration lend themselves to interventions that can improve wellbeing of migrant youth while also closing disparities with native populations.

To address these questions, we will organize the intellectual work of the network around three themes: (1) Social and economic consequences of age at migration; (2) Institutions of the welfare state and child well being; and (3) Migrant fertility and living arrangements. Although we expect the network to forge collaborative research largely by exploiting existing data, because all of the proposed hubs are engaged in some form of data collection, we expect that ongoing panel surveys will be modified to increase usefulness for understanding migration and child wellbeing.

1. Social and Economic Consequences of Age at Migration

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We use the term “young people” as a more encompassing term to include both children and youth, whose age boundaries differ although they sometimes overlap. See Appendix A.

From a research standpoint as well, the former is much more difficult to address and poses formidable data and computational demands.
How migration influences the wellbeing of children very much depends upon the counterfactual state that represents the basis for any causal comparison. Would the child have been better off: if the parents had decided not to migrate; the parents had migrated to a different country; if the parents had migrated at a different point in the child’s life cycle; or if the parents had given birth in the new country? Each question presupposes a different counterfactual, and all are relevant to an assessment of child wellbeing. Even this series of questions does not exhaust the possible dimensions of the issue. Planned collaboration will use existing cross-national census data for Canada, the U.S., Australia and Spain to examine how the timing of migration reverberates on multiple adult outcomes, such as educational completion, labor force status, marriage and earnings. Initially the team will focus on one set of the orienting questions: how would the adult outcomes of children differ if they had migrated at a different point in their life cycles? Focusing on this question is one way of allowing the concerns of child migrants to be informed by the research on child development. As such it will contribute to the development of a sub-field of research that intersects with migration studies and child development. Use of Canadian and Australian census data requires collaboration with in-country colleagues.

2. Institutions of the Welfare State and Child Wellbeing

This research theme will address the role of local laws and institutions in shaping immigrant children's integration in their host societies. Of particular interest are the policies and practices that affect children’s participation in childcare, health care and primary education. For example, we are interested in the extent to which immigrant children receive these services and the quality of the services they receive. Another consideration of interest is how the structure and quality of services are associated with children's health and development. Initially, we plan to use data from three birth cohort studies - the Millennium Birth Cohort Study (UK), the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (US), and the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Children (AU). Despite their similar language and cultural traditions, these three countries are quite different in terms of their provision of health care and educational services. All countries also exhibit pronounced internal differences in availability of support programs for migrant integration. Eventually, we hope to add data from a Canadian longitudinal survey of young children as well as other birth cohort surveys.

3. Migrant Fertility and Living Arrangements

A final theme to be pursued by the research teams will address how family formation and intra-household specialization impact wellbeing of youth with migration backgrounds. We will study fertility behavior of both the first and the second-generation immigrant women in order to understand how household choices differ by nativity; the evolving shape of family structure in aging societies that host large migrant populations; and the changing contours of social inequality by generational status. Fertility behavior of
immigrants is also important for assessing the sustainability of generous welfare policies in countries burdened by rising economic dependency ratios as the baby-boom generation approaches retirement. Comparisons of household formation patterns are also of interest to understand whether cultural patterns imported from countries of origin decisively affect nuptiality behavior (e.g., age at marriage, cohabitation, and ethnic exogamy) or whether contexts of reception better explain the observed variance in household dynamics. A final set of issues to be explored is the impact on children of intra-household labor market specialization between native families. For example, the teams will evaluate the merits of the family investment hypothesis across the four countries (this hypothesis holds that female immigrants will work in low status jobs to finance their husband’s human capital accumulation). To address these questions, research teams will use household panel data, national censuses and fertility surveys.

Network Institutional Hubs

The proposed network will be housed in the Center for Research on Child Well-being, which shares space and administrative support with the Office of Population Research, and engage collaboratively with three additional research centers located in Australia, the UK, and Spain. Canada is included in the U.S. hub to acknowledge that cross-national collaboration has begun as a direct result of the earlier seminars. Australia, Canada and the United States have historically been immigrant-receiving nations, but most of the research focus in each nation has been on labor mobility. For perspective, the United States has the largest foreign-born population in absolute terms (approximately 40 million, or approximately 14 percent of the total), but the foreign-born population share is larger in both Australia and Canada, 20 and 19 percent, respectively (although other sources give higher estimates for Australia). The UK’s foreign-born population is between 9 and 10 percent. Spain is of great interest because it shifted from an immigrant sending to an immigrant-receiving nation in the last two decades. Over the last 10 years Spain witnessed the largest absolute net migration among EU countries, swelling its foreign-born population share to nearly 12 percent by 2008.

Formalizing ties with three research hubs will both promote and facilitate cross-national collaboration on child migration in several ways. First, it will allow affiliates from all four centers to have access to privileged data. Despite the availability of longitudinal and cross-section data suitable for studying well-being of youth with migration backgrounds, many of the key data sets are not in the public domain or require collaboration with in-country scholars for access. The Australian and Canadian censuses with detailed age and income data are important examples. In addition, several countries have been conducting birth cohort panel studies that include large subsamples with migrant parents, but these data are available only via collaboration with same-country scholars. Most important, formalizing the 4-hub research network will facilitate cross-national collaboration in four ways: (1) promote collaboration among migration and child well-being researchers; (2) add a child centric focus to traditional migration research agendas; (3) broaden the international scope of migration research at each hub; and over

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the longer term, (4) institutionalize consideration of children and youth in research on migration and development.

**Hub 1. United States/Canada: Center for Research on Child Wellbeing**

The Bendheim Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing (CRCW) is an interdisciplinary center at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and the Office of Population Research at Princeton University. Its mission is to stimulate basic research, educate faculty and students, and influence policymakers about issues related to children's policies. CRCW supports two major research initiatives: the The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study [http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/](http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/), and *The Future of Children*, a journal for children's policies. CRCW associates are engaged in a variety of research projects on topics such as at-risk youth, immigrant families and children, education, health, families and households, and poverty and inequality. CRCW supports seminars, conferences, and lectures on topics related to children, youth, and families, including *The Future of Children* authors' conferences; and joint seminars with the Office of Population Research (OPR), the Center for Health and Wellbeing (CHW), and the Department of Sociology. The Center hosts several visiting research scholars and postdoctoral researchers each year. The proposed research network would provide two key benefits for CRCW: (1) internationalize its largely domestic research agenda; and (2) institutionalize international migration as a concern for wellbeing of children and youth.

All three principal investigators are affiliated with CRCW, OPR and the Woodrow Wilson School, although their research emphases differ. Tienda initiated the effort to broaden the scope of studies conducted at CRCW by organizing the Bellagio (2008) and PIIRS (2009) seminars. She has begun collaboration with Audrey Beck, CRCW postdoctoral fellow and Miles Corak, professor of economics at the University of Ottawa. Professor Corak has applied to be a visiting professor of Canadian studies for the 2010-11 academic year. McLanahan is director of CRCW, and principal investigator of the Fragile Families Study. In collaboration with Margot Jackson (Brown University), Kathleen Kiernan (York University), and Wendy Sigle-Rushton (LSE), she is studying the role of family structure and welfare state institutions in the production of health disparities by race, ethnicity and nativity. She will take the lead in directing the comparative longitudinal studies about welfare institutions and child wellbeing. Initially these will involve the UK, the US and Australia; comparisons with Spain will commence once suitable data is obtained. Alicia Adsera is collaborating with Anna Ferrer (University of Calgary) in studying family formation and fertility of Canadian and Spanish women and will take the lead in coordinating these studies to include Australia and the UK.

**Hub 2. UK: The Institute for Effective Education (IEE), University of York**

Based at the University of York, IEE develops and evaluates innovative education programs and practices in order to establish what really works in the classroom – and why. The work of the institute is focused on four main areas: evaluating education programs and practices in order to establish what really works in the classroom – and why. The work of the institute is focused on four main areas: evaluating education
programs and practices using theoretically and methodologically rigorous randomized studies; conducting scientific, systematic reviews of existing research; developing innovative new approaches for practitioners; and encouraging a shift in policy to favor high-quality research. The IEE organizes a varied program of events to advance knowledge of research into educational effectiveness, stimulate debate on relevant topics, and engage teachers, school leaders, policy-makers and researcher

The IIE director, Kathleen Kiernan, has been collaborating with CRCW director Sara McLanahan, and regularly visits Princeton. Involvement of IIE in the research network would achieve several advantages to the benefit of both institutions: first, it will broaden the comparative scope of research on child wellbeing by including two additional immigrant-receiving nations (Spain and Australia); second, it will bring into sharp relief a focus on children with migration backgrounds, which is not a central theme of work currently underway; and third, it will provide a venue to include additional researchers from nearby institutions into the child migration global network. Initial candidates include: Wendy Sigle-Rushton, London School of Economics and Political Science), who works on family formation and children’s wellbeing in industrialized nations; Brian Nolan, School of Applied Social Science, University College Dublin, who studies child poverty and migration in Ireland and participated in both the Bellagio and PIIRS research seminars; John Ermisch, Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), University of Essex, who is working on family structure but not specifically on migrant youth; Stephen Jenkins, ISER, who will spend most of 2010 at the Spain hub of the proposed network; and John Holmes, Post Doctoral Fellow, University of Manchester, whose research focuses on poverty, child development and health. Ermisch and Jenkins manage the British Household Panel Survey at Essex.

Hub 3. Australia: Melbourne Institute, University of Melbourne

The Melbourne Institute increasingly regarded as one of Australia’s leading applied economic and social research institute. It is nationally renowned in academia, government, business and community groups. The Institute aspires to be prominent on the international stage for its expertise and contributions to knowledge in key research areas of widespread international relevance by sponsoring high quality independent and impartial applied research on major policy relevant economic and social issues in Australia, contributing to the international literature in a limited number of key research areas that are of international relevance, including migration and child well-being; and fostering informed discussion and debate about public policy in Australia.

Deborah Cobb-Clark, currently professor of economics at the Australian National University, will assume the directorship of the Melbourne Institute in mid 2010. She participated in the 2009 PIIRS seminar on child migration and committed to collaborate with Corak, Tienda and Beck on studies about the implications of age at migration on early adult outcomes. Her participation ensures access to Australian data. Her decision to head the Melbourne Institute is fortuitous in that it affords researchers from the other hubs access to the rich data resources of the Institute. Dr. Guyonne Kalbe, Associate professor of economics, currently directs the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Children,
will join the Australia contingent of the child migration network. Additional members of the Australian hub include Peter McDonald (Australian National University) and Paul W. Miller (University of Western Australia), who has conducted research on language acquisition and immigrants’ labor market performance. His work is highly relevant to the themes to be pursued as part of the age at migration theme.

**Hub 4. Spain: Institute for Economic Analysis, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona**

The Institute for Economic Analysis (IAE) is a research centre of the Spanish Council for Scientific Research (CSIC) dedicated to scientific excellence in research and graduate education. Recent rankings recognize the IAE as a leading European institution for research in economics. IAE is a founding partner of the Barcelona-Graduate School of Economics, where Princeton professors Ashenfelter and Kahneman serve as members of the scientific council. The post-doctoral program - which has a long tradition and is presently under an ambitious expansion - is a privileged launching pad for careers in economics research.

In response to rapid growth of Spain’s foreign-born population, IAE launched the INSIDE Project (Insights on Immigration and Development), an independent, non-partisan network of researchers interested in studying various aspects of immigration to Spain. INSIDE sponsors immigration research and coordinates findings of scholars from different institutions to contribute to the public debate on immigration and development issues. The INSIDE network hosts at IAE a bi-weekly seminar series on immigration issues and a yearly workshop where the member of the research network present their work. In addition, IAE has reserved some of its post-doctoral positions for recent graduates interested in immigration topics. Finally, INSIDE produces a series of working papers on immigration. Despite its broad immigration research agenda, there is limited attention to children and youth, which is a benefit of joining the proposed network.

Directed by Clara Ponsati, IAE offers excellent research and convening facilities for faculty and graduate students who wish to pursue extended stays. In addition to several IAE faculty who work on various aspects of immigration (such as Joan Esteban, Ana Rute Cardoso, Ada Ferrer, Lidia Farre, and Jesus Fernandez-Huertas), the center has permanent collaborative exchanges with researchers at Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF) such as Francesc Ortega and Libertad Gonzalez, and at other Spanish Institutions. Researchers from the Instituto Juan March will likely be added to the Spanish hub in years 2 and 3 of the network plan; Tienda has been invited to deliver a lecture in February 2010, and to participate in a conference on migration in October 2010. She expects to identify additional participants for the research network.

**Research Strategy, Timetable and Deliverables**

For the network to add value above and beyond what researchers at the different hubs are currently doing, our planned activities must meet three criteria: (1) engage researchers from different disciplines (demography, sociology, economics, social psychology are the main contenders given the subject); (2) involve at least two, but preferably a minimum of three and optimally all four hubs; and (3) work on one of the
core thematic areas outlined above. Ideally, by year three our research portfolio would include projects that address questions that cross the thematic boundaries.

To accomplish these objectives, we plan to conduct workshops, research seminars, and sponsor short research visits (most likely no more than 2 weeks given budget constraints). All of the network hubs have capacity to host meetings and support short research visits, as indicated in the supporting letters. Between face-to-face meetings, we will arrange teleconferences as needed to broaden the participation of students and postdoctoral fellows. We will also build a website for the network to facilitate sharing of published resources and working paper series. This site would mimic that prepared for the 2008 Bellagio seminar, which was amplified following the PIIRS 2009 workshop (http://crcw.princeton.edu/migration/index.asp). The site has appropriate password protection, a library of papers and documentation for surveys, and links for accessing data that is in the public domain. In addition, OPR has excellent computing resources, including the capability for remote access to password-protected confidential data.

The first year is crucial for establishing the priorities and developing the agendas for each of the research themes; establishing criteria for the exchange of researchers across centers, and identifying additional participants for each of the themes. To this end we will convene at Princeton the directors of each hub along with two key collaborators whose interests coincide with core themes. This meeting should take place in early to mid July 2010 and will be structured so that time is divided between network operational matters and research substance activities.

In each of the three years we envision that each of the thematic groups will convene one meeting outside of Princeton, and that at least one researcher from each group will spend a two-week research visit at a collaborating research hub. Ideally these visits would be arranged in conjunction with a workshop and would allow the visitor to develop new collaborations, spend additional time writing a proposal, working on a paper or cross-training to use restricted access data files that are not available in the public domain. We envision the workshops as two-day events that would convene members of one or more of the research teams to discuss their joint project and to develop ideas for new projects. The workshops would include all postdoctoral fellows and graduate students at the host hub plus fellows and students who are part of the visiting team. For example, when Princeton hosts a workshop for the birth cohort project, invitees would include team members from Australia and the UK plus one or two trainees from each country plus all Princeton network members, including those working on other projects. We plan to hold at least one workshop each year at each node.

Research of the type we envision requires additional funding for data purchase, programming support, and research assistance. In addition, given the size and complexity of data files our research requires, cross training of collaborators, students and postdoctoral fellows to use the files is essential. Therefore, one of the short-run goals of the thematic teams is to craft research proposals that serve the dual purpose of explicating the theoretical and empirical goals of the collaborative
research and soliciting funds to institutionalize the collaborations beyond the period funded by the Global Fund.

Finally, and most important, we will generate research papers that engage theoretical and substantive questions outlined above and compare evidence for at least two but ideally all of the target countries. Electronic communication greatly facilitates cross-country collaboration, but many issues are more productively executed with verbal exchanges. Therefore we will use teleconferencing between the organized meetings. For the past six years, the Fragile Families Research team at CRCW has hosted bi-monthly teleconference seminars with Columbia University, which are attended by faculty and graduate students at both universities. We plan to host several seminars for each research team, depending on the availability of the technology at the different nodes.

At the end of the second year we will host a research seminar where collaborators present research from across the three themes and four network hubs. The location of this meeting is yet to be determined, with cost considerations factoring into the final decision. We will discuss key insights that would not have been possible in the absence of crossnational collaboration; identify strategies to improve on existing data sets (i.e., adding migration status items to existing, ongoing data collection); share ideas for enriching the network, such as by involving researchers from other centers and nations who are pursuing promising research on child wellbeing.

During the third year, in addition to the thematic group meetings and research exchanges, we will convene the hub representatives to consider alternatives to institutionalize the focus on child migration at each of the centers. As noted in the introduction, inquiry about child wellbeing and migration seldom intersects. The rise of child migration and the swelling second generation (children of immigrants) in both traditional and new immigrant receiving nations warrants a sustained focus on the issues we have outlined so that child development and national development are adequately understood as a process of human capital development with profound economic and social consequences.

We have deliberately limited our focus to research hubs in four nations in order to develop an effective strategy for deep and sustained collaboration. Several investigators from the primary research hubs are collaborating with scholars from other immigrant-receiving nations. For example, Wendy Sigle-Rushton has been working with Scandinavian colleagues and, along with Elizabeth Thomson, can help develop ties with Swedish institutions. Thomson is a family researcher with a joint appointment at the UW-Madison and Stockholm University, Sweden, where she directs the Demographic Unit (www.suda.su.se) and the Linnaeus Center for Social Policy and Family Dynamics in Europe (www.su.se/spade). Her research uses both large-scale comparative surveys and Nordic data registers and would strengthen links among the thematic cores proposed above. Similar opportunities exist in Germany and France; therefore, during the third year we will explore possibilities for expanding the international scope of the child migration network and solicit extramural funds to do so.
Benefits of the Proposed Child Migration Research Network

All of the collaborating institutional hubs will benefit from participating in the proposed network. The CRCW research program will be enhanced by expanding the international scope of its research agenda, which has been largely focused on domestic issues. Founding Director Sara McLanahan welcomes this mission expansion enthusiastically. The research agenda in Spain has largely ignored children and youth; hence the network collaboration will add this important component to their research program. The UK center will broaden its comparative focus to include Spain and Australia, but also systematically emphasize migration status in the study of child wellbeing. Finally, the Australian center will expand the international scope of its research on child wellbeing, while also focusing more systematically on the significance of migrant status.

A successful network, three years hence, can be evaluated with several concrete markers. First and foremost is evidence that children and youth are systematically considered in migration research. Institutionalizing a focus on children and youth in migration research is a lofty, but attainable goal that will be furthered by the proposed collaboration. An additional marker of success is receipt of grant awards among investigators of participating institutions. This will increase the likelihood of institutionalized collaboration beyond the duration of the proposed network. Other more concrete measures of success include: papers published that involve members of 2 or more collaborating institutes; involvement of graduate students and post-doctoral fellows in workshops, seminars and research papers with network investigators; changes in data collection that improve possibility of conducting research on child migration; and training of senior and junior investigators in use of data from one of the collaborating hubs, to name a few.