

Migration of girls in West Africa: *The case of Senegal*

Background Note

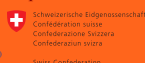
ACPOBS/2012/BN05

2012



*An Initiative of the ACP Secretariat,
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Children¹, both girls and boys, are known to have been migrating for various reasons throughout history. These kinds of movements are widespread and deeply rooted in the history and sociology of daily life in West Africa and its people. However, in recent years, various issues, such as the scale of and trends in the flow of migration, the involvement of young children and the large number of girls opting to migrate, have confirmed the lack of protection of these migrants as being one of the key concerns of policymakers², national and international child protection agencies, researchers and the media.

The United Nations (2012) reports that globally there were 33.3 million international migrants aged 19 and under in 2010 and they accounted for 16% of the entire migrant population. Children aged 19 and under in Africa represent 28% of all international migrants and nearly one in three migrants in West Africa. Most of these migrant minors are girls (53.6% in West Africa and 50.5% in Senegal; UN, 2012). The scale of child migration and the various types of abuse to which they are exposed explains to some extent the rising number of local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) trying to lend support to these migrants³.

In Western Africa, girls accounted for 53.6 per cent of international migrants under the age of 19 in 2010, most of them being South-South movements.

The rate is even higher in the following countries :

- **Sierra Leone** (63.5%)
 - **Ivory Coast** (61.9%)
 - **Gambia** (60.8%)
 - **Liberia** (58.5%)
 - **Burkina Faso** (58%)
 - **Togo** (56.6%)
 - **Nigeria** (55.1%)
 - **Niger** (53.8%)
- (ONU, 2012).

1 A child is regarded as anyone under the age of 18, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), CRC (1989).

2 Senegal has ratified the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights of the Child, although neither of these pacts is binding. The decision to take various infant-related initiatives, such as setting up a Ministry of Early Childhood, also underscores the greater awareness of a long neglected issue but child protection initiatives are still severely limited.

3 In addition to the major international agencies, such as UNICEF, Plan International, Terre Des Hommes and Caritas, various research groups like GREFELS, local associations and NGOs, generally work on the protection of children's rights. With support from the Ministry of Employment and professional organisations, the International Labour Organisation and the Women's Committee of the CNTS (Senegal's National Workers' Federation) launched a reception, counselling and information centre for young female domestic servants, most of whom are migrants, on 26 May 2011 in Dakar. Press reports are appearing almost every day both in the print media and over the Internet.

There has been some research on child migration and initiatives taken in this area but few take account of the gender issue, even though all sides stress the serious vulnerability of migrant girls and their greater exposure to abuse.

The twofold aim of this paper is firstly to show the general migration trends for minor girls in West Africa, describing a few categories of girls and their motivating factors, primarily based on the situation in Senegal⁴, and secondly to provide recommendations in this area.

Definition of unaccompanied minors

« Any person under 18 years of age or under a country's legal age of majority, separated from both parents, and not with and being cared for by a guardian or other adult who by law or custom is responsible for them. This includes minors who are without any adult care, minors who are entirely on their own, minors who are with minor siblings but who, as a group, are unsupported by any adult responsible for them, and minors who are with informal foster families»

(UN, 1997, recommended by the ACP Observatory, 2011).

Accordingly, the emphasis of this paper lies on providing a short description of empirically observed situations and experiences relating to the migration of young girls within and towards Senegal and in other countries in the sub-region, such as Ivory Coast or Togo, in light of the literature available on this subject. Owing to its descriptive nature, the paper only analyses key issues of the migration of girls, such as the impact the flows of migration have on the girls and the households involved. To a limited extent gender relations are being analyzed. The note does not deal with the issue of trafficking, as it is already covered by a Background Note by the ACP Observatory on Migration⁵.

1. Concepts and observations

To put the approach of the paper into context, I believe a definition should be offered of some of the concepts used here, such as “unaccompanied minors” (see text box), “minor” and “migrant”.

Minor: generally speaking a minor is understood to mean any person who, under the law of the relevant country, has not yet reached the age of majority. The age may vary from one country to another but it is generally set at 18 or a maximum

4 The choice fell on Senegal not only because it is the country I am most familiar with but also, and above all, because irrespective of one or two differences, it has a lot of features in common with other countries in the sub-region in terms of migration of young girls and boys.
5 See <http://www.acpmigration-obs.org/node/80>.

of 21 years. However, the minimum ages for people to get married or to work may be under 18 and may be different for boys and girls.

The concept of minor therefore may in some cases be synonymous with the concept of child defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as ***“Every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”***. On this basis, **I define minor girls as any girl under 18**. The concept of “minor” is used rather than “child” because child may and generally does refer to people below the age of 15.

International migrant: any person who changes his or her usual place of residence for more than 3 or 6 months (UN, 1998, recommended by the ACP Observatory, 2011).

2. Major trends in the migration of girls

In West Africa like in the rest of the world, child migration is very widespread and is large in scale. Irrespective of whether the pattern of migration is at domestic, cross-border or West African sub-regional level, the number of girls⁶ involved is significant and sometimes higher than the number of boys.

According to UNICEF, the population aged 10-17 accounts for the majority bulk of the migration of boys and girls combined. However, the under 10 years old represent a significant share, as a result of the support systems within families, which put their children, mainly girls, in the care of their close relatives to be educated. However, the large percentage of under 10 years old is also explained by the number of very young children, barely five years old (Jacquemin, 2009), who migrate to find work in the so-called conventional sectors or turn to prostitution. The age of migrant girls varies not only by category, conditions and factors motivating the departure but equally depends on whether they left by themselves or with their parents.

However, the ages of migrant girls and boys do not apparently differ to any great extent. Talibs⁷ in Senegal, Mali and Gambia, who figure large in the population of boys migrating within or across borders, generally migrate towards the

6 A young person in this case is understood to mean any person under the age of 25. A distinction is made between “young” and “child” to distinguish between young adults aged between 18 and 25 and minors under the age of 18, the age of legal majority in most African countries.

7 These boys are placed at a very early age in the care of Koranic masters, who are supposed to educate them, teach them the Koran and the tenets of Islam in general but these young people often end up being used for other financial and sometimes sexual ends.

age of 5. Other boys who migrate to seek employment in the Ivory Coast plantations, for example, work as street hawkers, or undertake other activities in the various West African towns and cities, are usually more than five years old. Broadly speaking, then, both girl and boy migrants are aged between 8 and 17 in the case of most occupations when they set off in search of work.

Whatever the age and gender, child migration is undertaken on a voluntary or forced basis but it is sometimes difficult to draw a line between voluntary and forced migration. As many of the girls and boys are very young when they leave their villages, the voluntary nature of these migration patterns is somewhat debatable. Furthermore, those leaving voluntarily may subsequently find themselves in constrained situations.

a. Motivating factors or reasons for migrating mentioned by girls

Some observers (Bop, 2010) believe the very young age of the girls and the large scale of their migration are the outcome of structural adjustment policies, whereas others (Jacquemin, 2009) believe the concept of family in many cultures has historically led parents to send their children to other family members. Therefore these policies are believed to have only changed the phenomenon and may have exacerbated the situation.

The many and inextricably linked factors motivating young girls to migrate are a reflection of various economic, social, political and cultural factors.

Young girls migrate to find work to help their families.

The migration of girls is often the result of individual and family strategies.

The many motivating factors the young girls cite are inextricably linked and permeate each other but are also the outcome of various economic, social, political and cultural forces (Fall and Massart, 2007; Massart, 2009; TDH⁸, 2009; Imorou, 2010; Ndao, 2010). And yet, these movements are first and foremost influenced by economic considerations, as a reflection of the poverty suffered by many African families in both rural and urban areas. People mainly rely on natural resources for their survival in most rural areas in Africa, in particular agriculture and related activities like cattle breeding. The crisis affecting the farm sector in recent years has deteriorated the food security situation and increased other socio-economic difficulties in these areas. The impact of climate change like drought, unpredictable rainfall, soil infertility in some areas, rudimentary farming

8 Terre Des Hommes

practices, among others, have led to a sharp fall or even a stagnation in farm production, a huge decline in farmable areas and yields (Ndiaye, 2007).

In view of this situation, rural communities are seeking alternative livelihood means, including child migration, involving both girls and boys. They generally migrate to work and help their families left behind in the villages. Referred to by CONAFE⁹ -Senegal (2006), an IRD¹⁰ survey carried out in the Fatick region, in central Senegal, included 10,136 children, 5,090 of which were girls and 5,046 boys, and 33.9 percent worked. This survey showed that more girls than boys are engaged in work. Some of them migrate by themselves, while others follow next of kin or leave with their parents.

In the minds of African people, allowing children to leave home or sending them away offers them more opportunities and a way of escaping poverty while also providing assistance to the family. This migration might only produce a paltry of resources but what little there is serves to strengthen the families' convictions about the benefits of migration, despite the risks involved. Hence parents, the main beneficiaries of these remittances, have a large responsibility in this process.

Apart from economic considerations, other factors include the search for better training and educational opportunities, curiosity about the outside world, individualisation strategies, armed conflicts, natural disasters, human rights violations (Imorou, 2010), emulation and the influence of tradition. Another factor is the porosity of African borders making it tremendously easy for children and adults, for that matter, to move around.

In some cases, the children are even involved in the decision to migrate which may therefore be the outcome of rational and strategic decisions of their own. Other children have no choice but to leave home to seek employment in areas requiring only traditional so-called female skills involving work as domestic servants.

The types, conditions and motivations relating to the departure, the extent to which the relevant children are involved in the decisions for them to migrate, engaging in work or not, the type of work, in particular, may vary from region to region, from one population to another and even from one child to another.

The Fatick, Kaolack, Diourbel and Thiès regions in Senegal continue to be the main origin areas of young female domestic servants but all the other regions and ethnic groups in the country are apparently affected by this process. For example, an increasing number of domestic servants are reported to be from the outskirts of Dakar and from the Wolof ethnic group.

⁹ Coalition Nationales des Associations et ONG en Faveur de l'Enfance

¹⁰ Institut de Recherche pour le Développement

b. Migration experiences and categories of migrant girls

UNICEF points to four kinds of child migration: children who remain in their country of origin, those who migrate by themselves, those who migrate with their parents and those born in the country of destination.

The migrant girls under consideration here tend to be more in the **unaccompanied minors** category, even though some attention is paid to **girls who migrate with their parent**. Moreover, the **movements** tend to be more **internal**, within their own countries, and, to a lesser extent, at **international level, mainly on a cross-border basis**. The **scales and durations** of the migratory activities also tend to **vary**.

Domestic work continues to be the main occupation taken up by migrant girls. And, depending on the countries, the category of migrant girls, their departure conditions and arrival status, young female domestics may receive a salary, paid monthly or not. They are also engaged in just this one type of work or together with another occupation, officially, or otherwise.

In order to make it easier to understand our categorization, we shall stress that **“little domestic workers”**, whether they be internal or cross-border migrants, are understood here to mean girls officially pursuing this occupation in families they are living with, or otherwise, and receiving a monthly wage¹¹. Accordingly, those who are not officially regarded as domestic servants and/or do not receive a monthly wage, are placed in other categories, as shown here. In other words, the “little domestic workers” referred to here fall into the category of “paid little maids” as defined by Jacquemin (2009) for Ivory Coast.

Moreover, there are dominant trends but it is no longer possible to refer to ethnic and regional specialities to explain the origin of working migrant girls.

Internal migration

These young girls primarily migrate from rural to urban areas (Imorou, 2010). They usually start off in their own districts, particularly when they are very young and over the years they may move to other regions, generally the capitals in their home countries. Two kinds of internal migration can be observed, seasonal or long term, and each one covers various categories of migrants.

¹¹ Girls here refers to girls who, even if they spend the day or week in the family where they work, return to another place, their home, in the evening or on the weekend, which is generally a room rented with other domestics in working class areas of the city. Hence they do not live with their employers but return home every evening or every weekend or even every fortnight. This distinction has to be made to draw attention to girls who live with the families they are working for and return to their villages only for temporary periods. They may be “little domestic workers” or “placed in the care of another family”.

- **Seasonal migration:**
- **“Little domestic workers”**

Seasonal “little domestic workers” covers:

- Students who leave to work in the city during their school holidays. Some of them, owing to convenience this offers, a desire to emulate their peers or compulsion, end up dropping out of school to work full time as domestic servants. This is one of the main causes of dropping out of school in Senegal, particularly in the Fatick region. These students working as domestics are aged between 6 and 14 (CONAFE-Senegal, 2006).
- Those who have dropped out of school or never went to school for other reasons, such as the accessibility of the school structures, poverty preventing parents from being able to afford school materials and/or compelling them to send their girls out to work in order to survive and the extent to which a girl’s education is considered as important as compared to a boy’s or not.

Long-term migration:

- **“Little domestic workers”**

“Little domestic workers” refers to girls who live away all year, returning to their villages only for family ceremonies or major religious and/or cultural festivities. In the light of the cases observed in Senegal, particularly in Dakar, this category apparently accounts for the majority of domestic staff. These girls are generally aged between 10 and 17.

- **Entrusted girls**

These young girls placed in the care of next of kin or acquaintances who do not have any children, or girls, or are quite simply financially better-off and likely to offer them education and a brighter future. They are sometimes related to their host family but not always. They are generally “placed” when they are very young, often before the age of 10. This is equal to the “little niece” category in the Ivory Coast, as described by Mélanie Jacquemin (2009).

Entrusting a family member is the oldest form of movement of children in West Africa. It concerns more young girls than young boys, and the girls can and must help with household and other tasks. Both poverty and solidarity of support systems within families explain this development. Nonetheless, children are not always placed in other families for unselfish motives, as parents are always hoping that their child and they themselves will gain in-cash or in-kind benefits from it. In many cases, such as in Ivory Coast, Benin, and Senegal, it concerns another form and another status for the female domestic servants, which

calls into question the concept of solidarity to justify placing these girls in a non-kinship family which is normally supposed to offer them a better future. Some children are even “sold” in the guise of entrusting them to someone else.

Those “placed” owing to a bond of solidarity between families, *a priori* never return to their original family, as they are supposed to have become fully-fledged members of their host family. Accordingly, they have little or no ties with their biological parents, particularly when the “adopted” mother has no children.

Others are placed in other families to work have to be paid but not always every month. Some of them are not rewarded on a regular basis but when they return to the village they are paid in kind, as the host family then fills their “suitcases”, also offering money and gifts to the girls and their parents. However, the person for whom they work regularly will provide some money to send to their family or to cover their personal needs. It is not easy to classify these girls.

- **“Young girl vendors”**

These street vendors operate alone or as assistant vendors in the streets, along major roads or in the markets. They sell different types of produce, such as locally produced juices (Fléchette and Aduayi-Diop, 2005), water and prepared meals, among others. Most of the girls are placed in the care of other families, or are “little domestic workers” who are taken on especially for this type of work or also perform domestic duties (Aduayi-Diop, 2004).

These girls may combine different statuses and hiring practices, such that a girl may simultaneously be placed in a family, and act as a domestic servant and vendor in the same family or be placed in one family and be a domestic servant and/or vendor in another.

- **Girls who migrate with their parents**

These are girls who generally migrate with their mothers because, according to some research (Bopp, 2011), after a certain age, the men remain in the villages while their wives migrate to the cities to find work. They work as domestic servants or help their mothers working as home laundresses, scavenging or selling cereal products and/or looking after their younger siblings while their mothers are out working. They are rarely more than 8 or 10 years old, after which age they more often than not set off to work as domestic servants and/or vendor’s assistants in other families.

The girls do not migrate alone so cannot be classed as “unaccompanied minors” but they may be just as vulnerable and exposed to other forms of exploitation, particularly when they work as domestic servants or street vendors. Even so, they are rarely covered by protection programmes and initiatives.

To conclude this examination of categories and statuses observed in the context of intrastate migration mention should be made of the **“rented child”** category defined by Jacquemin (2009) in reference to Ivory Coast. These are children who are placed in other families but in return for a payment. This is a category whose members have the characteristics of both a domestic servant and the characteristics of a child placed in a family, as within this context the girl carries out the essential part of the duties associated with domestic work and/or vendor’s assistants. A tacit financial agreement is concluded beforehand between the host family and the girl’s family. These girls are paid every month or upon their return. Jacquemin nonetheless points to the many host families who fail to respect the agreement, exploiting the girls, thus compelling the parents to take back their girls or seek other means of protection.

Intra-African migration: - **“Little domestic workers”**

TDH (2009) has provided a description and analysis of a case involving young girls in the 8-14 age category migrating from Akébou in Togo to Accra in Ghana, to work as domestic servants. They are generally placed by intermediaries. Some girls in Togo migrate internally, primarily towards Lomé, while others, the majority according to TDH, set off for Ghana and particularly Accra. Setting off alone, with the assistance of others or under compulsion these girls head for Accra as the prime destination for various reasons, such as its position within easy reach of Akébou and its socio-economic and historic ties with this region.

TDH has also shown that the migration of these girls are primarily economically motivated on the basis of rational decisions to migrate to Accra but their departures are also planned, resulting from processes carefully prepared beforehand by the families and migrants with “assistance” of

Intra-African migration is primarily of cross-border nature, such as between Senegal and Gambia, between Senegal and Mali, between Senegal and the two Guineas, Bissau and Conakry, between Mali and Burkina Faso, between Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso, and between Togo and Ghana. **These countries are either a country of departure, transit or destination or all three at the same time.**

intermediaries. Being distant relatives, next of kin or merely “informal placement agents”, these intermediaries are in touch with the girls’ families and are responsible for placing employers and domestic servants directly or indirectly in touch with each other. In some cases, these “placement agents”, manage the girls’ payments and take commissions.

Examples of the cross-border migration of “little domestics” being reported are between Southern Senegal and Gambia and between Northern Senegal and Mauritania and vice versa. However, unlike the girls from Akébou, these youngsters are not “recruited” by intermediates but set off “alone” often joining close relations or, more extensively, a network of citizens from their own area of origin.

- **Beggars or beggars’ guides:**
 - **Beggars’ guides**

These are girls from Mali who their parents place in the care of blind people for financial compensation, while the work involves acting as a guide in Dakar¹². The girls are very young, hardly 10 years of age, or even less. These girls seem to be chosen precisely because they are so young and in addition to their obedient natures (Bop, 2011) the minors are likely to soften the hearts of and attract generous donors.

Due to their young age, these girls are more likely to arouse the sympathy of people who will give more generously than they would in the case of adult beggars, for example. They spend their days crisscrossing the neighbourhoods and, above all, the roads in downtown Dakar to lead their employer (the blind beggar) around in search of charity.

- **Beggars**

For some time now, young Tuareg girls from Niger or Mali have been seen begging in Dakar, Thiès and Saint-Louis with their mothers. These, too, are very young girls, about 5 years old and sometimes less. As in the case of the girls guides of beggars the young age of these beggars appeals to people’s sympathies. The girl beggars are also instrumentalized but this time by their mothers. As they do not speak the local languages, they tend to resort to aggressive begging, grabbing holding of passers-by and only letting go when they receive a coin or two.

¹² Beggars from neighbouring countries are attracted to Senegal because of the reputation the Senegalese people have for strictly complying with the religious ordinances to give alms.

Girls from Senegal's interior regions also arrive in Dakar accompanied by their parent(s) to take up begging, sometimes alone or with their mothers. Save the Children Sweden claims that in the year 2000 Senegal had over 39,000 child beggars, aged 14 or under, working alone or accompanying an adult. CONAFE-Senegal believes the figure is much higher. A distinction has to be made here between girl beggars and beggars' guides with the Talibes, who are generally boys but beg as well.

- **Young Guinean brides**

These girls migrate to Senegal to join their husbands, who are often vendors in the food trade. As well as carrying out domestic duties, they sometimes help their husbands selling. They are usually very young, between 10 and 15 years old. The incidence of early marriage is extremely high in Guinea, as in many other African countries, particularly amongst the Peul community.

These girls arrive in Senegal, alone, to join husbands who they may hardly know or not at all and are generally much older than the girls themselves. As they do not speak most of the local languages, particularly Wolof, this tends to exacerbate their social and psychological isolation when they first migrate.

- **Displaced people**

These are girls who migrate by themselves or with all or some of their family members to flee from armed conflicts, particularly in Casamance, in the case of Senegal. They mainly head for Guinea-Bissau, Gambia or other regions in Senegal. Children and women are the ones most affected as during any armed struggle. The ages of these girls displaced by conflicts varies from newborn to the majority age.

c. Impact of domestic work and lack of rights protection

After looking at migration motivations and types of girl migrants, this section concerns the effects of domestic work on the minors. Some leave of their "own free will" or at the request of their parents, while others are held by adults who exploit these girls economically or sexually.

Girls are legally or *de facto* excluded from the protection granted by workers' rights and social security.

They work in the homes of private individuals and carry out most of the domestic duties in these homes (cooking, laundering, cleaning, looking after children, elderly people, the disabled, etc.).

Associations such as the AEJT (the Association of Working Children and Youth of Senegal) and the Association of Domestic Servants (association des travailleuses domestiques) offer examples of good practices in providing internal protection for these girls and may sometimes be more effective in preventing certain types of risk and abuse but their room for manoeuvre and financial means continue to be limited in this area.

They do not have any set working hours, and live-in girls do not have any defined hours, sometimes starting very early in the morning and finishing very late in the evening. Those who do not live in their employer's home work comparatively shorter hours, but some employers make them work long hours so they arrive home late, only to have to return to work early the next morning. They are all poorly paid and work in harsh conditions. This confinement makes them more vulnerable and exposed to various types of exploitation, abuse and mistreatment. They also face other risks, such as rape, unwanted pregnancies, clandestine abortions, infanticide, STDs and HIV and clandestine prostitution. They often have to contend with sexual harassment and sometimes end up getting raped by a member of the family for whom they work or in the places where they stay. Domestic servants are also often wrongly or rightly accused of stealing, while some employers use this as an excuse for not paying their employees.

The incidences of trafficking or exploitation experienced by many domestic servants apparently do not deter those aspiring to leave or discourage their families.

The continuing eagerness to opt for migration is attributed to various reasons, such as a lack of information, the secrecy surrounding experienced migration dramas and the dire poverty of the families. Either the prospective migrants and their parents are unaware of all the risks, or the family's tribulations, together with an eagerness to head for the city and discover another universe, are severe to the point that the young girls, encouraged by their next of kin, continue to migrate, even when they and their families know the risks.

In the absence of any way of halting the process, owing to such factors as the economic benefits, albeit small, for the families, the need to improve the living and working conditions of these girls, both minors and those of majority age, is being increasingly recognised in national, regional and international fora.

Some families themselves try to develop protection strategies, such as preventing the girls from migrating until they are a bit older (Jacquemin, 2009), or no longer entrusting them with intermediaries, who may direct them towards prostitution rings, or changing host families when these mistreat their girls and/or refuse to pay them.

The ILO's adoption, in June 2011, of the International Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers is a reflection of a greater awareness of the plight of these girls.

Young female domestic servants are increasingly standing up to their employers, particularly when they reach a certain age, and are more often inclined to refuse certain working conditions. For example, they no longer have any qualms about changing employers, a situation that, paradoxically, incites employers to opt for younger girls who are more compliant.

The social and economic value of domestic work has been increasingly recognised in recent years. In spite of the dire working conditions, ill-treatment, exploitation and other types of abuse, these migration patterns enable these young girls to acquire economic resources, which are invariably shared between the migrant, her family and the rest of the community.

Seasonal workers employed as domestic servants during school holidays are able to use what they earn to buy clothes and school materials when they return home, and purchase gifts for their close family members. This means less expenditure for their parents, who may be able to keep part of the money.

In short, **families continue to be the main beneficiaries of the income generated by child migration.** However, the income does not create any significant change in their living conditions, particularly as the migrants' financial contribution continues to be very low but more symbolic than anything else. Even so, it helps to further the socio-economic progress of these girls and their comparative empowerment. Thanks to the emancipatory benefits of their remittances (Simmel, 1987), which are crucial to the survival of their families, these girls are able to redefine the power relationships to some extent on a small scale within their families.

Girl domestic workers, like all migrants, send the bulk of their income home to their families, to be used for day-to-day expenses, education, health and ceremonial purposes.

These girls also build up **social capital**, learn skills related to hygiene, sanitation and cooking, while gaining new linguistic abilities. They also help create new role models as a result of adopting urban fashions, changing their attitudes towards their families and embracing new customary rules. There is also a change of attitude in matrimonial and demographic terms (Lesclingand, 2004). Working in an urban environment means they may, if they so wish, get married later on and once they are married they will be familiar with the birth control methods required to decide on the number and time in between having their children. They may also **become new role models of social success** in their native villages.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1 Conclusions

Migrant girls have different profiles and are of different ages according to the motivations, departure conditions and their category of migrant girls. While some girls leave home before or towards the age of 5, most of the migrant girls under consideration here are in the 10-17 age group. These girls mainly work as domestic servants, a category to be found in all African countries (including Ivory Coast, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo, Ghana and Nigeria). Depending on the countries, regions and the spatial scale of the migration patterns, they are placed on the basis of different systems and may have different statuses successively or simultaneously.

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child does not prohibit child labour but it does call on the Member States to take steps to prevent unfair working conditions, as a reflection of their young age, their lack of training and professional capability and the risk of networks taking advantage of their vulnerability.

These girls start work at a very young age even though article L. 145 of the Senegalese Employment Code, for example, specifies that “children may not be employed in any undertaking, even as apprentices, before the age of 15, unless an exception is granted pursuant to a decision by the Minister of Employment, in the light of local circumstances and the duties they might be required to perform. A decision by the Minister of Employment lays down the type of activities and categories of companies prohibited to young people and the age limit to which the prohibition applies “.

Pursuant to the Senegalese state's ratification, in 1999, of **the International Labour Organisation's Convention 182, pursuant to the Law 99-72, of 14 January 1999**, the Government of Senegal re-affirmed its commitment to combat the worst forms of child labour, including domestic work and begging. In spite of the availability of legislative, and judicial, national and international frameworks, children, both girls and boys, are generally working in unauthorised sectors where they are exposed to abuse of all kinds.

Notwithstanding the continuing gender differences, girls are reported to migrate just as much as boys and at varying ages. However, they do not always set off in the same conditions as boys nor are they engaged in the same work activities. They are also subject to social supervision. However, they may all be faced with trafficking situations but the girls are more vulnerable.

Nonetheless, the migration of children, girls and boys, has to be seen against the entire background of its empirical complexity (Ndao, 2009), which points to multiple and diverse dynamic processes and the various and varying effects on these girls and their families. **The migration of children is not good or bad in itself**, as it may be effective for learning, the development of human, financial and social capital, the redistribution of resources, but they do render these girls vulnerable (Massart, 2009).

Accordingly, **by confining themselves to the trafficking issue, some child protection programmes and measures help to stigmatise migration and fail to consider the educational and emancipatory benefits of the process** (Lesclingand, 2011, TDH, 2009). However, approaches that adopt a "positive" attitude¹³ (Massart, 2009, Ndao, 2009), highlighting the skills, strategies and tactics applied by these young migrants as well as the contribution migration makes, should not overlook the down side as **various factors and working conditions may transform this migration into trafficking and a type of modern slavery**.

13 The champions of this "positive" attitude support the idea that these movements are a result of family and even individual survival strategies, thus the struggle of children in search of various advantages such as financial resources for themselves and their families, well-being and training.

3.2 Recommended action and advocacy

Before migration of girls takes place:

Facilitate economic and human development in the areas of origin by:

- Tackling the issue of the number girls dropping out of school, which may be both a cause and an outcome of migration;
- Creating and improving technical education centres for girls outside the school system in their villages;
- Developing vocational training tailored to their circumstances and at the request of their regions;
- Raise awareness of parents, the main recipients of the remittances, on the risks girls have to contend with in an urban environment, particularly when they are “isolated”, and multiplying information campaigns;
- Encouraging parents to register births, as many children in African villages do not have birth certificates, thus making it possible to find out their exact ages¹⁴ and making it easier to gather this information in the census.

As migration of girls takes place:

Data collection and research

- Undertaking in-depth quantitative and qualitative research to quantify the migration process as a result of data gathering and analysis, and facilitate exchanges of information between states, and to identify more effectively the actual causes and motivating factors, and the experiences and, above all, taking into account the specific features of each country, each community, each group of migrant girls, etc.;
- Disseminating the research findings and involving the media more in prevention and awareness-raising campaigns, focused on the risks of girls suffering abuse, by offering the press documented and reliable materials;
- Ensuring official narratives, research and measures are consistent with the *experiences, expectations and needs of the target populations: the migrant girls themselves and their families.*

¹⁴ They often lie about their age, while their lack of identity papers makes the work of the relevant organisations more difficult and may end up misleading certain employers.

Gender

Improving the extent to which gender issues are included in child protection agreements and programmes.

Agency

- Refraining from the tendency to underestimate personal and rational decision-making in the context of migration without overlooking the constraints and all the types of abuse girl migrants have to contend with;
- Taking account of self-protection strategies for girls.

Law and protection

- Conducting advocacy campaigns for the ratification of international conventions, including the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families and the [Convention concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers](#)
- Monitoring the measures taken and ensuring the enforcement of existing conventions;
- Paying more attention to an often overlooked category, girls who migrate with their mothers and are just as vulnerable as other migrants.

Cooperation between various stakeholders

- Involving civil society more in programmes for protecting the rights of these girls;
- Promoting and lending more support to local organisations, such as associations launched by former domestic workers.

To conclude, the issue of migrant girls undertaking domestic work provides an opportunity re-examine the question of power relationships between women.

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An Initiative of the ACP Secretariat, Funded by the European Union

Implemented by IOM and with the Financial Support of Switzerland, IOM, the IOM Development Fund and UNFPA

