

Themission of **the International Forum for Child Welfare (IFCW)** is to work for children worldwide to improve the quality of their lives and to enhance opportunities for the development of their full potential. [**http://www.ifcw.org**](http://www.ifcw.org)

This mission represents a commitment by IFCW's members to work for the fulfilment of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in every nation and is to be achieved through the strengthening of nongovernmental child welfare organisations (NGOs) worldwide in their direct and indirect service to children and families by:

* Organising and improving information exchange and cooperation among members.
* Educating world opinion on the interest and well-being of children.
* Promoting and organising conferences, seminars and study groups.
* Cooperating with other recognised bodies having similar objectives.

The impact of migration on children is one of IFCW’s priority issues : ***‘in keeping with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, IFCW and its representatives to the UN will advocate for comprehensive humanitarian immigration reform for children and young people worldwide’.***

# The International Forum for Child Welfare (IFCW) has members across the world, some of whom are themselves national umbrella agencies. All member agencies work with children who are 0-18 years old across the whole range of services. Members of IFCW primarily operate at national or regional level although some are international. In order to develop work on the agenda of children and migration, this year’s IFCW WorldForum will be held in Naples between 26-29 November 2012 and information is currently being gathered from plenary speakers and workshop leaders to inform the wider children’s sector. The topic of the WorldForum 2012 which is open to members and non members is:

# “Family, children and education at the core of the new challenges of social development: global scenarios, migration and active citizenship"

# <http://www.worldforum2012.org/en>

The primary focus of the contribution of IFCW is drawn from the direct experience of IFCW members working with children and families rather than from academic sources. By the date of the UN Day of General Discussion, we aim to gather more information and case studies from a variety of countries to share orally in the meeting. Inevitably the real life experiences of the children and young people with whom our members work may be described by children and young people in slightly different ways to descriptions gathered through quantative studies, governments or professionals. We hope to provide some ‘soft’ information to assist the design of policies, legislation and services that are informed by children and young people themselves. We believe that some of the solutions rest in the empowerment of the young notwithstanding the critical importance of legal and other policy initiatives. It is important to children that they are treated respectfully and in a non discriminatory manner wherever they are. Schools across the world can do a considerable amount to reduce the trauma experienced by children affected by migration. Other services that deal with children and families affected by migration at the front line can also treat the individual child with respect.

A key priority for IFCW members is to ensure that children who are experiencing the impact of migration achieve their full potential educationally.The reason is that this right is seen by children and young people themselves as the most effective route out of dreadful situations of poverty, sexual exploitation and separation as well as enabling them to actively engage in the society in which they live. This may seem surprising as they experience so many problems, but many young people see education as their lifeline and ‘a ticket’ to a better life.

In July 2011, IFCW gave both written and oral evidence to the **UN** **2011 High Level Segment (HLS)** when it was considering the topic of education.

IFCW’s evidence was entirely about the impact of migration on a child’s right to develop his or her full potential and particularly the right to education. In oral evidence to the HLS, the IFCW President encouraged greater collaboration between the various parts of the UN structure, in particular strengthening the connections between the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and ECOSOC where topics relating to children are frequently covered.

There are millions of uprooted people worldwide, of which approximately half are children. The issue of migration is universal and is a major barrier to achieving educational goals.  With globalisation and liberalisation, migration between countries and to urban localities is on the increase, especially in the developing world where rural development is not as pronounced as urban development.  The scale of the problem is difficult to measure and is increasing. It is essential that governments improve methods of collecting data about the number and whereabouts of the children in their country in order to plan services appropriately for them, especially education, health and welfare services.

The issue for migrant children is compounded in countries where the general level of education is poor; for example in Indonesia where there are 85 million children under 18 years out of a population of 240 million, where there is a 9 year compulsory education level but only 7.2 years is reached. There are also millions of children remaining in their country of origin, separated from their parents who have been forced to work elsewhere which is a direct contravention of the UNCRC. Citizens of countries such as the Philippines may spend their entire working lives in other countries, especially in SE Asia, separated from their children.

In countries of the European Union, where movement across borders is simplified, there are many separated children, children of migrant workers and refugees. The political focus on the Roma people has been particularly stigmatising. There are three major categories: undocumented, unaccompanied and GARS (Government Assisted Refugee Status). The increase in exploitation and sexual trafficking has been rapid and largely under the radar of governments and statutory bodies. IFCW believes that the NGO sector has a considerable contribution to make towards addressing this issue as NGO’s operate at grass roots level as children and families may be more willing to approach them than the authorities thus improving intelligence gathering.

Although the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has regularly told States Parties that asylum seeking children should not be detained, many governments persist in ignoring these basic human rights. The UK Government for instance prioritises its immigration policies over separating children from their families. Methods of removal of parents and/or children are extremely variable and may frequently be traumatising for the children. Governments should be held to account if they do not prioritise legislation safeguarding children (wherever they come from) over other national legislation, especially immigration legislation.

In the Mexican and Central American populations there are over 400,000 undocumented people of whom one third are children and youth.

Migration also occurs within borders and is frequently detrimental to education. For instance the population in Delhi doubles in size every six years more by migration than by birth. The census is every ten years and as a result, migrant children are effectively lost for 9-10 years in the databases and are virtually denied their “right to education” as the plans and schemes do not include them and no budget is provided for them.  Governments should improve methods of collecting data about the number and whereabouts of the children in their country.

Children on the move between countries are the most marginalised and vulnerable. They experience multiple disadvantage and are most likely to remain uneducated due to a variety of factors including:

* they may have been trafficked/exploited/unreasonably detained
* interrupted education (if they were educated) in their country of origin.
* possible horrific experiences in their home countries and flight to new country
* speaking little of the language on arrival
* discrimination and stigma
* changing care arrangements: losing parents or usual carers
* having parents who are emotionally absent
* living with families who do not know their educational and social rights
* encountering problems securing education and at an appropriate level

Members of IFCW believe that migrant children are the least able to access education and for governments to succeed with them would contribute to a better understanding of barriers for other groups of children.

Although the UNCRC has been ratified by virtually all countries, evidence about the way in which these children’s rights to education are protected is very limited. IFCW believes that by strategically addressing the issues for migrant children with national governments the UN Committee and ECOSOC could radically improve their life chances and prevent future educational failures because of artificial separation of families due to work or to immigration policies.

Many IFCW members are directly involved in education programmes which are trying to redress the damage for children (both accompanied and unaccompanied) and so some examples of current practice will be given from India, Indonesia, South Africa, countries in central and S America as well as Europe.

There needs to be a concerted effort to ensure that all children who require primary education are known about in appropriate geographical areas so that resources and policies are fit for purpose. Close attention needs to be paid to migration both within countries and between countries to achieve the desired educational outcomes for children if migrant families. Children also have a right to family life and the emotional impact of disrupted family life has extremely negative consequences educationally. Not only must education be available, but the child must be in a psychological state that is conducive to learning.

Monitoring of a country’s educational achievement needs to take into account the fact that large numbers of children globally are not even known about and many of these children are migrant children.

Vulnerable groups who are inevitably at a considerable disadvantage, particularly migrant children, must have their rights to education upheld. This will require consideration by national governments of how the immigration laws in the country should assist rather than prevent these children being educated. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has been recommending this regularly but many countries continue to choose to ignore their recommendations.

Migrant children have particular needs and these must be properly assessed. These needs include emotional as well as educational and linguistic needs.

Catriona Williams

President IFCW

10TH September 2012

Annex

Recommendations

1. there needs to be better collaboration between the various parts of the UN structure, in particular connections between the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and ECOSOC where topics relating to children are covered such as education
2. ‘in keeping with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, IFCW and its representatives to the UN advocate that there should be comprehensive humanitarian immigration reform for children and young people worldwide’
3. governments should improve methods of collecting data about the number and whereabouts of the children in their country in order to plan services appropriately for them, especially education, health and welfare
4. governments should support the development of the NGO sector which has a considerable contribution to make towards addressing issues arising from migration, sexual exploitation and trafficking because NGO’s operate at grass roots level and children and families may be more willing to approach them than the authorities, thus improving intelligence gathering
5. migrant children have particular needs and these must be properly assessed. These needs include emotional as well as educational and linguistic needs.

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