

Child Migrants Along the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor (CORAL) – a Child Protection Programme in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria

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CORAL's core purpose is to strengthen child protection services for migrant children and children affected by migration, including increasing access to those services, reinforcing existing services, creating new ones, and stimulating synergies between the formal and the informal actors. This research brief is based on a baseline study carried out in the first phase of the project to help identify situated approaches to implementation, drawing evidence from all five countries but aiming for locally specific actions and solutions.

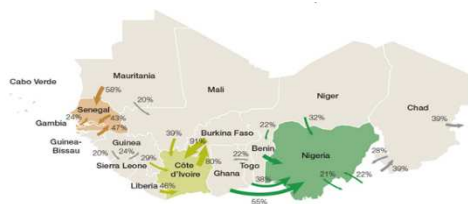
BASELINE STUDY

Rapid appraisal of contexts in which child migrants and children of migrants live, learn and work was undertaken in eight sites across the five programme countries. Our sites were major markets (Abidjan, Accra, Lomé, Cotonou and Lagos) and border points (Noé, Aflao and Seme-Krake), as these vibrant economies attract many migrants, including children, who are trying to make a living. They are also major sites of vulnerability and exploitation and nodes in migrant networks.

The research centred on children's and youths' perspectives and engaged a total of 552 children and young people and 46 adults, all either protection actors or employers. Qualitative participatory methods were used to bring these perspectives into light in a short span of time, as we only had three days in each site. Drawing and role plays about vulnerabilities, safety and well-being, and aspirations for the future were used in conjunction with focus group discussions. Photovoice followed by individual interviews offered insights into young migrants' day-to-day lives and their hopes for the near future. Semi-structured in-depth interviews provided examples of fuller life stories and perspectives on how families and significant relatives shape children and youths' pathways. Group and individual interviews with adults involved in different forms of child protection exposed local ideas about childhood, provision and protection. Finally, we trained a small number of child research assistants to help with qualitative research and to work as enumerators in simple surveys. The latter aimed to pilot child-centred participatory monitoring and evaluation processes.

FLOWS OF MIGRANTS WITHIN WEST AFRICA

Migration data show that both Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria are important but disconnected destinations for migrants within West Africa. Transport links along the Abidjan-Lagos corridor have resulted in limited migrant settlement. Most child migrants follow the flows of adult migrants and we found examples of historical networks that were important pathways for placing children with employers and skilled masters. In



Only values greater than 20% of the emigrant workforce from each country present in the other countries of the region are represented.

Source: United Nations (2015), Department for Economic and Social Affairs, International Migration Trends © 2016. Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD)

addition to the cross-border regional flows, many of our participants were internal migrants.

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

In West Africa, adolescent 'children' under the age of 18 often take on social responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings and their own children or earning a wage to contribute to family wellbeing.

These contributions are important both to their own socio-cultural and emotional development, and to the wellbeing of their communities. They are critical for understanding children's work and mobility, as well as their experiences of vulnerability. In this respect, it is notable that the average age of child migrants documented in the pilot survey in Ghana was 15 years, which is very much the age at which a young person will be transitioning towards social adulthood and independence in the region.

Migrant narratives reflected this. Many adolescents migrate temporarily for work, including to earn money to pay for school fees, and their motivations go beyond economic need to include the desire to grow, learn, being adventurous and contribute to their families. They take pride in overcoming or surviving adversity.



Migrant girl in Aflao trading from her table outside her grandmother's house, while a friend tries to convince her to continue school (Source: photovoice, September 2017)

Child protection strategies must take these nuances into account, working with rather than against existing social norms and structures.

Vulnerability and support

Children are not vulnerable uniquely because they are migrants or because of their young age. Vulnerability is the outcome of intersecting issues.

Severe poverty and families' consequent inability to feed, care for members and educate their children was frequently

referred to by adolescents as a reason for leaving home, as was loss of one or both parents and intra-familial conflict. These causes sometimes intertwined and increased the vulnerability of young migrants, as was the case of some of the young migrants whose siblings had spread across multiple locations with long term consequences for their relationships. Those who had experienced violence within their family or had run away often found themselves in positions of vulnerability *because* they lacked familial support.

However, this was not always the case. A large number of young migrants contributed to and benefitted from practices of solidarity and mutual assistance among siblings. Younger migrants supported older siblings by providing childcare or pooling (part of) their income, and both older and younger siblings helped pay school fees.

Practices of childcare within the extended family are common and quite a number of younger child migrants were accommodated by a grandparent, an aunt or an uncle or by a sibling. In one research site, these practices have been formalised through neighbourhood authorities to include young vulnerable children beyond the extended family.

The baseline study recommends that local, often informal, initiatives are supported and complemented with initiatives for adolescent migrants who often fall outside their remit. Sensitisation and incentives to broaden the target group of local initiatives should be sought, keeping in mind that some adolescents need help to attain social adulthood more than care within a family context.

Placement for work and skills acquisition

Despite the years of anti-trafficking sensitisation efforts across West Africa, old and well-consolidated placement channels are still used to secure work for migrant children.

In this brief research, we heard several positive and negative experiences of placement but got deeper insights into the practice in Côte d'Ivoire. Placements were organised by men (and some women) who had networks in Togo and Côte d'Ivoire.

Brokers recruit children in response to requests from employers but also on the request for help finding work or an apprenticeship abroad from children or their parents.

The remuneration for the young migrants' work is borne by the employer. It is usually paid both in kind (accommodation, food, care, sometimes schooling, literacy, apprenticeships) and in cash, in principle on an annual basis. Often, money is paid to the broker, who is responsible for forwarding it to the child's parents or saving it on behalf of the child until the end of his or her 'contract' of several years. The vulnerability of children placed in work is strongly linked to their dual dependence on the broker's authority and that of the boss or guardian. The risk of exploitation and abuse is high, especially for the youngest children, because of the blurry boundary between family-like relations and employment relations.

Adolescents are also placed in apprenticeships, which remain one of the most desired routes out of poverty for children and their families. When they work, apprenticeships are an excellent mechanism for skills transfer and can enable children to transition into a stable future profession. However,

at times these arrangements can stray into exploitation, with children denied their 'liberation' if they fail to pay the required fees. The vulnerabilities of apprentices are general and not *per se* linked with placement practices.

Anti-trafficking programmes and social change have reduced the use of placement channels but have also obscured the remaining ones. Based on the interest among Togolese community leaders in Côte d'Ivoire, we believe that forms of regulation could be put in place. Thus, we recommend the setting up of a collective multi-stakeholder forum to discuss these practices and find ways of improving them, if not eradicating them. The central objective should be better protection of children in care, and future-oriented education/training opportunities.

Choices of abode and identity

"There are NGOs that have room for you if you want to stay but I don't ... I'd like to learn something. I like schooling, but it's not every day they give you that. For now, I just want some money to start up business. I do small-small trading but would like to sell my own goods" (Street girl, Accra, September 2017).

Not all of the young migrants wish to conform to the rules of families or formal child protection institutions. For reasons of age and experience they seek social adulthood and independence. The child and youth migrants who identify as street children are in a similar situation as non-migrants. Some visit their family from time to time, others do not. Generally, they all live in economically very constrained situations and they are vulnerable to theft and violence where they sleep.

Differences across research sites reveal that inspiration for solutions can be drawn within the programme countries. In Accra, for example, sleeping in public spaces is relatively institutionalised with paid access to toilets and shower facilities. Police harassment is gendered and primarily targeted at street boys. In Benin and Togo, the correlation between street-sleeping and experiences of difficulty or abuse is very high. In addition to hard-handed policing, street children noted that theft by older street youths was a major impediment to their ability to get by and to save up.

While access to shelters and health services should be part of the solution, especially for those identifying as street children, opening up for savings opportunities should be a priority. In Ghana, many young migrants use mobile banking; extending access to younger and undocumented migrants across all five countries would be welcome. Other options should be discussed and developed with the young users.



Police man chasing a street child with his gun drawn (Source: Drawing from Lomé, July 2017).

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