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Department of Social Work and Social Administration
The University of Hong Kong
香港大學社會工作及社會行政學系



New Report by PathFinders and The University of Hong Kong Calls for Enhanced Collaboration to Protect and Respect Children Affected by Migration

11 May 2023, Hong Kong - The importance of exploring strategies and opportunities for cross-sector collaboration to ensure all children affected by migration are protected and respected was the focus of a panel discussion today to launch *Children at the Heart of Migration*, a new report published by PathFinders in collaboration with The University of Hong Kong (HKU).

Speaking in the panel discussion were Dr. Lucy Jordan, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, HKU, international award-winning photographer Xyza Cruz Bacani who used to work as a Migrant Domestic Worker (MDW) in Hong Kong herself, together with PathFinders' CEO Catherine Gurtin.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of MDWs entering our homes in Hong Kong, making significant contributions to countless families across the city. Today, there are approximately 340,000 MDWs in Hong Kong and the government anticipates needing 600,000 MDWs by 2047 to help care for a rapidly ageing population. Over 90% of these MDWs are women of childbearing age. Many are also mothers who leave children behind to work overseas and provide them with a brighter future.

To date, most migration management and labour policies neglect to adequately reflect the potential impact of migration on children - whether born in the country of destination or left behind. While migration is, and will continue to be an important engine of economic growth for families, it is crucial governments and other stakeholders put in place safeguarding mechanisms to prevent any negative social impacts of migration on children, especially before mass migration of women is encouraged as caregivers for ageing populations.

Today's panel highlighted the importance of further discussions to explore opportunities for collaboration among NGOs, government departments and other stakeholders - across both sending and destination regions - that are aware, engaged, and willing to work together to ensure all children affected by migration are protected and respected.

Catherine Gurtin, CEO of PathFinders, said, "As observed and assisted by PathFinders over the last 15 years, MDWs may fall victim to love scams, sexual abuse, and unplanned pregnancies while living and working in Hong Kong. With the population of MDWs set to almost double over the next 20 years, we need to act now to prevent an emerging and potential crisis for migrant children.

Children sit at the heart of everything we do at PathFinders. On the occasion of our 15th anniversary, we reaffirm our commitment to the protection and respect of children born to migrant mothers in Hong Kong. At the same time, we want to use our voice to raise awareness and advocate for stronger protections for children left behind."

Dr. Lucy Jordan from HKU said, “According to our research, which discusses the longer term impact of growing up in transnational families on children across Southeast Asia, there is a potential 'crisis of care' in the region as increasing numbers of parents migrate overseas for work, leaving their children behind.

At the moment, very little is known about the longer-term costs and benefits for children and other family members who remain in migrant sending countries. Through this report we hope to start a conversation that makes a case for the development of effective policies and practices around labour migration both within origin countries and within destination regions, such as Hong Kong.”

Sharing her own personal experiences, **Xyza Cruz Bacani** said, “I was a child left-behind by my migrant mother when I was eight. I grew up without her so I know how challenging and painful it was to be away from my own mother. Migration has touched our family’s lives in so many ways. My story is not unique, it is the story of millions of children left behind by a migrant parent.”

The panel is calling on relevant stakeholders to put in place effective safeguarding mechanisms to prevent any negative social impacts of migration on children. These include:

- **PRE-DEPARTURE PREPAREDNESS: Provide comprehensive training in sending countries, tailored with destination country relevant information.**
Typically, curriculum at employment agencies includes rudimentary housekeeping, cooking, labour regulations, and language and cultural training, and excludes forms of life-skills training. For all migrant women, pre-departure preparedness needs to include a focus on crisis prevention and migration goals, including duration, financial planning, and reproductive healthcare knowledge. For migrating mothers, training needs to also include additional emphasis on child guardianship, family togetherness and tips for transnational parenting.
- **ON-ARRIVAL SUPPORT: Reinforce comprehensive training provided in Pre-departure Preparedness on arrival in the destination region.**
For example, as part of a “welcome programme,” in addition to reflecting on and refining migration goals, nonprofits can signpost available MDW community and NGO services. Information on general and reproductive health can be provided along with child safety, positive parenting, and other topics of importance to the migration and child safeguarding experience.
- **COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT: Establish strong community networks in destination regions, supported by NGOs with education and empowerment programmes, to prevent crisis situations and facilitate child development-orientated conversations.**
For example, a support network of migrant mothers could come together to co-create a “curriculum” of child development topics, while supporting increased and improved quality of communication with children and family in countries of origin.

- **MDW/EMPLOYER RELATIONS: Develop employer awareness of MDW as mothers to increase empathy and ensure they provide the structural conditions to facilitate more effective transnational parenting.**
A key example is sufficient breaks and access to their mobile phones, so conversations between mother and child are possible.
- **RESEARCH AGENDA: Conduct further research to understand and more clearly establish the link and potential impact of migration on child protection, health and development, specifically including both origin and destination regions.**
Generate more information about specific contextual factors in Indonesia and the Philippines as sending countries, and HK as a destination region, to create cross-national interventions - including civil society and government partnerships - that are well-suited to these contexts.

Full report available at:

<https://www.pathfinders.org.hk/research-publications/children-at-the-heart-of-migration/>



From left: Dr. Lucy Jordan from HKU, Xyza Cruz Bacani and PathFinders' CEO Catherine Gurtin

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About PathFinders

PathFinders believes every child deserves a fair start in life. PathFinders is the only Hong Kong charity dedicated to supporting the unique vulnerabilities of children born to migrant mothers. Since

2008, PathFinders has supported over 10,400 mothers and children to find a path to a brighter future. To find out more about PathFinders visit www.pathfinders.org.hk.