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**Well-being of children and labour markets in Europe
Different kinds of risks resulting from various structures and changes in the labour
markets**

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**The poverty of children in migrated families or
Analysing the well-being of children in migrant families: Lessons from the
Barcelona reports**

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PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Considering the need for methodological choices among measures of poverty and the contradictions caused by the results that they produce (see for example, *Bradshaw's* and *Flaquers'* papers in this Conference), it appears that there is an **underlying debate** that has to do with tensions between how to deal with **diversity and inequality** in the approaches developed and, to a certain extent, between the advantages and disadvantages of measuring child poverty and child well-being.

On the one hand, we are encouraged to abandon **relative measures of poverty** (all relative measures, such as relative poverty lines, may hide radically different situations in different countries, therefore, they tell us little about real living conditions) and to rethink lever promoting and programs that distribute social transfers. On the other hand, **cultural diversity** undoubtedly plays a role in the subjective well-being of children, but it can also lead to distorted images or to serious misunderstanding of children's real experiences related to poverty, when compared.

I think that we should be **interested in films as well as in photographs**, that is, in inferring and interpreting the outcomes of the indicators applied but also in capturing the experiences. This requires a **processual approach** that, also to a certain extent, should acknowledge the value of identifying inequalities as well as exclusions. Too often, analysing poverty strays in favour of the latter. The concepts both of exclusion and poverty become naturalised entities, impeding more dynamic analysis, which should instead focus on

structure as well as on **agency**, because **the** children of immigrants experience different dimensions of inequality and develop attitudes and strategies for survival—within the mainstream standards or outside these.

Children are central in migration. Migration is always a family issue, a search for better opportunities that will be tested through children's well-being in time. But, when we refer to **poverty in migrated families**, our representations overly frequently reveal:

-that we see **poverty** as a fatal outcome of migration, surrounded by culturalist explanations such as the idea that *all migrant generations within a family* use double frames of reference, the poor condition in the receiving country being preferable to the previous condition in the home country (as this commonly occurs, for example, with 'failure' in the field of education, as apparently preferable to 'illiteracy');

-that **children** of immigration can be seen as *troubled* (accumulating indicators of risk) when younger but as *troubling* when older, progressively undeserving of social transfers;

-that **migrated families** are seen as unable to properly take care of their children and adolescents in very many aspects.

I would like to be able to overcome these ideas, too easily affecting our analysis as long as they are social representations, too. In this paper, I summarize an analysis of our figures, interviews and policy documents with this goal in mind.

MIGRATION AND POVERTY OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

In spite of being a rich area within Spain, social inequalities have increased in Catalonia in recent years, whereas efficient systems of social protection to address this have not been developed at the same pace. These inequalities unmistakably affect children in migrated families.

According to the last report on Poverty in Catalonia (*La pobresa a Catalunya 2004*, Fundació Caixa de Catalunya), under the threshold of poverty there is an over-representation of lone mothers with dependent children, people above 65, people belonging to the Gypsy/Roma minority and *more than half of recent immigrants*, with an increasing contribution of the latter category to the first one. In effect, one of the clear tendencies identified by the CIIMU reports on children and immigration is the exponential growth of one-parent families led by women among all foreign nationalities (both from richer and poorer countries). Moreover, new births and arrivals of foreign minors are adding to the population of national children and youth of immigrant descent in a diversity of invisible statistical and political situations. But 'children in poverty' are scarcely mentioned in academic studies and official data; instead, the 'risk of exclusion' paradigm is widely used,

while we defend that both approaches are needed when focusing on children in migratory processes, when **poverty** is understood as a specific **experience of inequality**.

If work and family were regarded as the two basis upon which traditional ideas about the welfare state were developed, besides the introduction of new critical approaches to the whole scene, attention must be paid in the first place to changing **working conditions** and **family forms of migrant families** if we intend to produce a higher understanding of one of the most important situations affecting the well-being of children in southern European societies at present.

Information available on common indicators strongly support this need. Four kinds of forces lead to poverty of children in migrated families. In the first place, **the legal status of adults** and the consequent double invisibility of children as limitations to welfare. In the second place, migratory strategies affecting **transnational household economies** directly and indirectly increase when family networks are fragmented by difficult reunification processes. Family short- and long-term goals at the economic level (from remittances to investments in the host country) also have an impact on child poverty, not only in terms of the economic priorities of migrated families. Third, and in relation to this, recent research shows that the **emergence of female projects** is influenced by the changing gender roles within migrant families and households in the host country (and by their impact on decision making), leading to an increase in family breakdown and one-parent families depending on women with fewer economic resources. Finally, poverty among children in migrated families is also the **result of social policies related to immigration**. An examination of local policy specifically addressed to the immigrant population would also contribute to uncovering the greater economic vulnerability of children in migrated families in Spain and in highlighting the **misleading separate targeting** of children of immigrants in order to design social policies to reduce this.

PATTERNS OF IMMIGRATION TO SPAIN AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

The estimated number of immigrants in Spain was 3,500,000 in the last three months of 2005, about 30% of these having settled in Catalonia. More than 40% of this population had no legal status until recently, though this situation has changed for more than two thirds of immigrants over the last few months.

Social polarisation is increasing, partly due to the fact that the immigrant population already represents an average of 9% within the country, with an annual growth of more than 40% in the last five years¹. At a local level, in the city of Barcelona for example, the proportion of foreign population was 0.8% in 1997 whereas it is now 14.5%. But the rise of inequality is not only a consequence of the growth of the recently arrived immigrant

¹ Source: España en Cifras 2005. www.ine.es

population living in poorer conditions than the Spanish. In the **patterns of immigration to Spain**, the importance of other social and national immigrant sectors should also be highlighted: first, about 25% of foreigners come from rich countries. This percentage is increasingly represented by young professional EU couples, with young children; second, the remnants of middle- and upper-middle professional classes—again, with children—from Latin American and Middle Eastern countries (impoverished or not) are also being attracted to Spain as a new destination or as an alternative to the US. Currently, the majority of immigrants come from Latin America; Africa now occupies the second position; the EU-15 is third, followed by Asia and Eastern Europe. The ranking by countries has also recently changed: Ecuadorians are now the second largest foreign population in Catalonia after Moroccans (there were almost no Ecuadorians 6 years ago). That is, by countries, Ecuador, Morocco, Colombia, Peru, Argentina, Pakistan, Italy, China, the Dominican Republic, France and Philippines make up the top 10 in the area of Barcelona. Absolute numbers of nationals from Ecuador, Italy, Bolivia, Peru and China are increasing, but there are also very high relative increases in the numbers from a variety of countries such as Argentina, Paraguay, Nepal, Bolivia, Mexico or Norway. Growth and annual variations are taking place in the migrant fluxes both from high-income and low-income countries.

This social polarisation is clearly reflected in housing conditions, working status, the educational attainment of parents and carers of children in migrated families. But, contrary to what might be expected, immigrants from poorer countries also represent a variety of socio-economic positions in their countries of origin. For example, we can clearly perceive that the fall of fragile Latin American economies produced impoverished former middle classes—measured in relative terms—with a high cultural capital and with equally high aspirations for their children, as seen through the migratory strategies decided upon. The following data come from our 2002 Report on Childhood and Immigration in Barcelona and have been contrasted with more recent studies on this issue (IOE, 2005):

Housing

In addition to the difficulties that the non-EU foreign population face in gaining access to decent housing (such as rejection, discriminatory excessively high rent...), we should also bear in mind a paradox that particularly affects the adult foreign population with children: strategies of financial saving involved in the migratory project itself may force the temporary acceptance of housing conditions that are actually below the level required for receiving support or meeting the standards in requests for family regrouping.

Morocco is the main place of birth for the heads of families of children of foreign origin living in the smallest-sized homes (less than 40m²). In this category, particularly noteworthy are other groups from poor countries, such as The Phillipines and those of sub-Saharan Africa, a good number of whose children live in housing of these dimensions. In the first of the two intermediate categories (40-80 m²) we find, above all, heads of families from Morocco and the countries of South America, whilst the second (80-120 m²) in large measure

corresponds to the children of South-American families. However, where the contrast is most evident is in larger-dimensioned housing (over 120 m²), which is principally taken by people from the EU-15, Japan or Canada and the US.

Families that own their own home are mainly those from the richer western countries, that is, from the EU-15. Additionally, however, in the case of Morocco, we find that a proportion of children live in family-owned homes more frequently than is the case for other groups from the non-western countries. This leads us to assume that such families make considerable efforts to acquire their housing, facilitated by the longer history of their settlement in Catalonia, via a project of permanent settlement or a savings strategy through investments in housing, following the mainstream trend among the national population. Children from the sub-Saharan countries, Central America, the Indostan peninsula and, again, Morocco (because of the high number of its immigrants), are still nevertheless to be found more commonly in rented accommodation.

Countries of origin for foreign children living in larger housing as defined by number of rooms basically are part of the EU and South America. In contrast, children living in smaller housing, also as defined by number of rooms, are principally from African and Asia countries. The case of Morocco, despite its representation that is broadly similar to the national population in standard categories, is nevertheless characterised by pertaining to the group with housing providing fewer rooms: that is, this is one of the countries whose population is spread over a greater diversity of housing situations, thus reproducing social polarisation within the immigrant group itself.

Children of families from African countries are those that most suffered from a lack of basic facilities in the home. In contrast to this, children from South-American or EU families approximated or in many cases even exceeded levels of facilities in the home found among the mainstream national population. For example, the lack of a home telephone in Catalonia affected 42.7% of children of Moroccan origin and 41.4% of children of sub-Saharan African origin, while it is enjoyed by almost every child in homes among nationals and foreigners of richer countries.

Working status and educational attainment of parents and carers

The clearest characteristic provided by these data is the polarisation between socioeconomic educational, employment and professional levels, respectively above or below levels corresponding to the local population. In January 2001, the total population surpassed the foreign population in primary studies, and was increasing distances with respect to secondary studies; however, it was somewhat behind with respect to advanced studies. In the first two cases, we find heads of families with children born in North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia. The highest levels of education are concentrated in the population from the richer countries, Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East. A significant proportion of the Latin-American population, and that of Central and Southern Africa, have mid-to-high levels of education.

Heads of families with children of an EU origin are those that most approximate to the patterns of employment situations characterising the local population; in between this, we find heads of families with children of South-American origin, with diverse migratory models that, in consequence, tend to be spread more over the various categories. On the other hand, heads of families born in Morocco in homes with children and adolescent minors have an important presence within the category of 'temporary worker', although since 1996 the most frequent category for this group was already that of 'permanent worker'. But non-qualified workers and service-sector activities have a greater presence amongst heads of families from poorer countries, in spite of the diversity in educational attainment described above.

Other features

The average age of this new population is still low, usually corresponding to their most productive and reproductive periods in the life cycle, with an increasing balance in the sex ratio among all the groups (the only exceptions being countries from Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa). In recent years, besides the immigration of individuals and families, births to mothers of foreign origin have increased in Catalonia to the extent that they represented almost 20% of all births in 2005 (Spain has one of the lowest birth rates in the world). Spanish nationality is not automatically obtained through birth on Spanish territory, and some parents will not immediately proceed to apply for their child's right to nationality for fear of their illegal status being detected by the police, which might lead to their arrest and repatriation. This has direct consequences on well-being and shows us how misleading policies can be when the individual child is treated as a segregated target for social policy when this very child does not even exist on official records!

To complete this picture, we should not overlook the direct contribution of the Spanish immigration laws to the experience of family fragmentation. According to the last available data concerning reunification processes (2002 and 2003), accepted applications for family reunification have increased. However, even in the accepted applications, while some family members were accepted for reunification, others were not, regardless of age of members and type of kinship ties with the applicant. This is leading to an increase of family fragmentation at a transnational level, introducing still further inequality between families of different national origin in the immigration pattern, and to substantial differences in their children's experiences.

CHILDREN IN MIGRATED FAMILIES AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES

The extraordinary shift in migration to Spain is obviously reflected in education, where a state average of 8.4%² of students in compulsory education are of foreign nationality.

As a part of the social polarisation mentioned above, there is a worrying process of **segregation** amongst schools. The number of foreign students in public schools is disproportionately high compared to that in private schools. This is especially the case in Barcelona, where 15% of pupils in state schools are of foreign nationality as opposed to only 3% in the private sector. The rapid increase of immigrant students in Spanish schools has been parallel to the development of a comprehensive reform in the education system that was approved by the socialist Prime Minister Gonzalez's last government but was actually implemented by the conservatives, in power from 1996 to 2004, who were against it and its high cost. Two of the features of this reform were the extension of compulsory schooling to 16 and the provision of free pre-school education in regular schools from the age of 3. The initial lack of public places in compulsory education that were *provisionally* to be covered by private schools with public funds ("escuelas concertadas") was in fact the way by which the private sector—represented both by religious and lay schools—has become a permanent receiver of public investment, with increased power in educational debates. As a consequence, the flight of middle and lower-middle class nationals from schools with increasing numbers of immigrant students from poorer countries has been made even easier than in other countries that underwent this process earlier. At a political level, this situation is extremely difficult to reverse.

At present, the highest rate of foreign students is found in primary education, followed by pre-schools and finally by secondary schools. There are differences in both the origins and economic level of students in all these areas, (and also in high school and higher education). In the Spanish system, education is compulsory until 16 and students must obtain a Certificate of Secondary Education (an equivalent of the GCSE) to be allowed to enrol in post-compulsory education (whether this is oriented to university study or professional training). There are no official records detailing the obtention of the Certificate by nationality, but we can easily identify great inequalities among the students' different origins if we compare the figures for subsequent education:

- In areas with medium and high class populations (mainly, wealthier EU and certain sectors from South American countries), post-compulsory education is the norm and the proportion of foreign students in high school and further education is larger than for other groups (though more South American students than EU students are found in professional training)
- From poorer South American countries, there are half as many students in high school and further education than in compulsory secondary school

² Source: Datos y cifras curso escolar 2005/06. These figures correspond to the 2004/05 school year.

- From North African countries, the data show worrying results: the number of students in any type of post-compulsory education is only a quarter of those in compulsory education in the previous school years

Bearing in mind that non-EU nationals cannot legally work under 18, not even through labour-training contracts, the question arises as to where all these 16 year olds go, year after year! Moreover, if their parents have not requested, or cannot easily obtain, or do not want to obtain Spanish nationality for their children when they become 18, a new generation of ‘illegal immigrants’ comes into being, in theory composed of young adults who have never lived anywhere else but in Spain.

Catalonia follows the general pattern of other European countries, although the region has more recently become a receptor of foreign immigrants. According to the last Eurydice Report (2004) on the question, this means that in countries where immigration started earlier, students with an immigrant background tend to be found in cities rather than in areas of disperse population or rural areas.

Finally, the language of tuition in Catalonia is Catalan, which means that absolutely all newly arrived foreign students need special support.

MIGRATION PROJECTS: BETWEEN ADULTS AND CHILDREN

The analysis of the interviews conducted with immigrant parents from 6 different origins (Morocco, Ecuador, Philippines, Dominican Republic, Russia, China) lead us to two main issues: 1) problems related to the **integration/accommodation without assimilation** of children with immigrant backgrounds into mainstream peer groups; 2) problems related to the **divergent projects** of migrant adults and their children.

Above all, however, we need to point out that, in marked contradiction with the popular but simplistic and socio-centric idea that some migrant adult groups ignore and/or show little interest in the educational needs and processes of their own children, it seems apparent that these **parents are in fact highly concerned** about these issues, and are **entirely aware** of the problems affecting their children. But they are helpless to overcome what is often considered **the failure** of the migration project.

In more detail, these two conclusions can be presented as follows:

- The main concern stated by parents, both related to their own job opportunities and the needs of the migrant networks they are representing is the regularisation process and the situation of foreign minors.
- Another emerging concern is that related to the preservation of their own language and community practices.

- These two main concerns focus increasingly on the first: that is, the regularisation of foreign minors from age 16 onwards in order to grant equal opportunities to such minors both in being able to continue into higher education and in their legal access to labour market.
- In the parents' view, intergenerational conflict is greater among immigrant groups. The reason for this can be found in different ideas about the way young people should deal with their future, and concerning changes of authority patterns within the family, family roles and relationships. As regards this idea, parents who belong to immigrant associations claim that they need such resources to provide mediation with society at large and to provide support for the families.
- From the adults' point of view, there is a contradiction between expectations for continued education and the need for financial collaboration from their sons and daughters within the context of the migratory project. Two profiles can be distinguished, mainly linked to the average levels of academic and professional qualifications of the group in the migrant's home country, with an emphasis on the causes of their concerns and conflicts.
- On the one hand, those who show the highest *concern for the lack of academic orientation of their children and their aspirations for rapid access to any employment*, belong to the medium-high social and educational group, usually overqualified adults in unskilled jobs. This circumstance leads them to believe that their sons and daughters lack the positive models —the parents' own example—that link post-compulsory further education to better job opportunities.
- On the other hand, those who show more *concern for acculturation*, and for the loss by their children of links with the home country, their relatives and communities, belong to lower social sectors with lower formal education. These social sectors within the different immigrant groups suffer from a certain lack of understanding of the roles of compulsory education in the receiving country, and perceive a certain conflict between further education and the maintaining of more conservative family configurations than those of the majority population.
- Regardless of how long they have been settled in the new country, and in agreement with that suggested by the specialised literature, *adults in groups most exposed to racist aggression minimise this circumstance and expect their children to have a similar attitude*. The largest groups (Moroccans and Ecuadorians), however, spontaneously mention the emergence of attitudes of resistance among young people, and their own adult concern with this, principally the risk of it developing into more anti-mainstream, alternative intra-ethnic peer group ways of their children's strategies to obtain status.
- Some adults (from China and Russia) issue indirect warnings about the negative relational and psychological effects of positive student stereotypes, known in

the literature as a 'model minority' stereotype (highly called into question by research since the late 1990s)

- All of the parents in immigrant associations express their worries about language loss as well as the loss among younger generations of certain cultural practices pertaining to the home culture or minority community, and the current difficulties of counteracting this process.
- Adults in several groups express the *difficulties of intergenerational relationships deriving from the experience of family fragmentation* (both in the long or short terms) and directly or indirectly *draw attention to the loss of status that comes with this reunification*
- Among the difficulties related to the family reunification processes affecting children and adolescents, two different issues become intertwined, adding to an already difficult experience: the emotional needs of different family members, on the one hand, and more selective needs, on the other. That is, those needs linked to the economic goals of the family migration projects *through children and adolescents*.

LIMITED AND MISLEADING LOCAL POLICIES FOR IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

The Immigration Plans of three cities receiving immigrants, and which we have selected for analysis (Mataró, Terrassa and Barcelona), despite being different from each other, tend to produce similar gaps in that there is *no provision that specifically coordinates or articulates actions addressed to the children of immigrant at the local level*.

The following are some detailed conclusions of this analysis:

- Although these are councils with identical political ideologies, the Plans seem to have been developed on the basis of local immigration dynamics and dimensions, without unifying the political criteria or transferring experiences and initiatives between different municipalities; partly for this reason, strengths and weaknesses in the respective Plans are not the same.
- The analysed Plans are not centred on the immigrant subjects and are even less immigrant child-centred. This lacking approach impedes any guarantee that the Plans respect the Rights approved by the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- We have not been able to identify an analysis of specific needs or a design of specific measures to overcome the barriers to full integration facing children in immigrant families at different stages in their life cycle and schooling process; the

most clear example of this is the failure to identify and address the legal limits to teenage employment and post-compulsory education for young minor immigrants, as mentioned above.

- In this sense, in spite of being documents of reference for local policies concerning immigration, the Plans *reproduce the different invisibilities of children of immigration and the overexposure of cultural diversity* (already indicated as a trend in the first report). What often happens is that the set of measures and actions actually carried out are not reflected in the Plans, for political reasons (they have to be approved by local councils, and parties governing the councils do not want to be more specific in what they communicate. This is a matter that needs resolving, although we have also conducted interviews with administrators and social workers in order to attain contrasted opinions and information at every local level)
- There seem to be hidden agendas, differentiated from the creation and implementation of the Plans: from a tendency towards the implication of local-entity networks, to a tendency to make explicit the political and management directions of the municipality, intense and differently inter-related municipal debates and different concepts of subsidising.
- Local Plans continue to stress the need for public awareness, when the developments that have taken place require more decisive and dedicated local actions with clear facts that can be evaluated, especially given the earlier comments in this paper.
- The Plans have updated the debate about the universal or specific nature of different services to meet unexpected needs related to new immigration, with different solutions and availability depending on the sector of the population addressed and the types of services designed in specific villages and towns..
- No provision is made for enrolment at nurseries, or for the conditions required to do so. This omission is particularly grave, given the general lack of places and the restriction of access experienced by the population in irregular legal situations. This lack of provision can clearly affect the already greater vulnerability of children in migrated families: it seriously determines the aim of the migratory project—that of mothers, fathers and other relatives—which is to find employment; it also postpones what should in theory be the best opportunity to guarantee the early integration of young children into the mainstream society and at the very least to develop language skills (90% of Spanish children from all social classes attend nursery schools).

SOME FURTHER REFLECTIONS (OR OPEN QUESTIONS)

Spanish **social policies** in the areas of early childhood and family-support institutions, health and education are based on the assumption of the permanent settlement of standard family composition; this should be reviewed. Additionally, specific strategies concerning social transfers have to be developed in order to reach the children whose parents' status remains illegal.

Patterns of immigration have changed dramatically over the past two decades and there is growing evidence to suggest that **multi-local families** are becoming increasingly common, and this is the situation produced by more recent migration strategies, affecting a larger proportion of immigrant families and their children in Spain, given that the major shift has also occurred more recently. Overall, such a change forces this issue to be located within the larger **context of globalisation**.

Social ties, at the **transnational level**, must be central in this analysis: relationships and commitment to places and people outside the observable local communities. When examining the impact of migration on children and adolescents, attention must be paid to those who join their migrant parents abroad (initially or later, with reunification) and those left behind: *this* is the complete picture, not simply that which we detail in our observable end-of-migration process.

Even children in migrated families from poorer countries often experience **downward mobility of the family**, particularly those who have come through reunification after a time of living on remittances that are greater than their home average standards (due to the fear of loss of emotional ties partially compensated by extra investment in children's consumption or by gifts from migrant parents). They may also face **downward assimilation**—into poverty (the outcome) and into local intragenerational norms—which directly affects their subjective perception of well-being, leading them to an increased **questioning of their parents' migration projects**.

We could provisionally conclude that there is a **higher experience of poverty among children in migrated families in Southern European countries** due to internal and external processes such as new multi-local/ transnational family strategies of permanent migration from poorer countries, the emergence of a specific situation of social polarisation due to a pattern of immigration that includes families with children from richer countries, and a lower level of social transfer to children in general, as states continue to rely on traditional family networks of support that—to a large extent—migrant families do not usually have.

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