

Children's Well-Being: Indicators and Research 12

Christine Hunner-Kreisel
Sabine Bohne *Editors*

Childhood, Youth and Migration

Connecting Global and Local
Perspectives

 Springer

Children's Well-Being: Indicators and Research

Volume 12

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Editors

Childhood, Youth and Migration

Connecting Global and Local Perspectives

 Springer

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Chapter 1

Childhood, Youth and Migration: Connecting Global and Local Perspectives – Introduction

Christine Hunner-Kreisel and Sabine Bohne

In the year 2015, as this book is being prepared, Europe experiences to an unprecedented degree the arrival of refugees from Syria, the Balkan countries, from Afghanistan and Northern Iraq as well as from African countries. Among the refugees are many children and youth; many of them come with their families but some arrive alone as so-called unaccompanied minors. With the arrival of these people new challenges arise in almost all sectors of society; for instance in educational institutions such as preschools, kindergartens, schools and universities as well as for professionals such as educators, teachers and professors. Scientists, too, are called upon, and—considering that many of the refugees and migrants are still young—in particular those in childhood and youth research. Important issues include the experiences, hopes, wishes and fears of children and youth and their *well-being* before, during and following their migration. Other empirical questions concern educational policy and the organization of education for newly arriving children and youth: what are the preconditions in the destination countries for an equitable participation in society and thus for fairness, and what is being put into place? Also of scientific interest are questions of societal cohabitation: childhood friendships and peer relations among youth, engagement with different norms and value systems, and the need to address discrimination and racism by, among and against children and youth, as well as in educational institutions and other segments of society. Finally, it is important to understand how social practices straddle borders (Pries 2002), for instance keeping in touch with family and friends at home. Which forms of transnational life emerge and which motives and opportunities matter for children and youth?

‘Childhood, Youth, Migration—Connecting Global and Local Perspectives’: against the backdrop of these current events and the challenges they present the title of this book is program. Its four parts engage with the questions raised above: I Children and youth’s own perspective in migrant societies, II Education, social

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differentiations and (in-)equality, III Questions of global and local living, IV Living circumstances shaped by patterns of migration and mobility. The book is based on an international conference at the University of Vechta in 2013 that was supported by the German Science Foundation and had as its topic *Childhood and Migration* with a special focus on gender and generational questions. With additional contributions the scope of this book has expanded. The focus on ‘childhood’ was broadened to include ‘youth’; the ongoing debate on the significance of gender and generation in the context of migration moved into the background in order to make room for contributions that examine the social significance of other categories such as class, ethnicity and religion as well as spatial distinctions between urban center and periphery. This introduction will first put the notions of childhood, youth and migration that are central to the book into a thematic and conceptual framework. Then each contribution will be summarized briefly.

Childhood, Youth, Migration: Connecting Global and Local Perspectives

Migration as a phenomenon is most often motivated by the search for a better life (Punch 2010, p. 209). Very often people—children, young and adults, migrating alone or together as a family—, migrate to ameliorate their own or others’ living conditions and seize opportunities for realizing a good life. Today as well as in the past this search for a better life is very often triggered by global economic restructuring in urban and rural areas of the so called Majority World, which impact upon the lives of children, young people and their families. Socio-economic transformations can result in increased levels of migration from rural to urban areas (see in this volume the chapter by *Yafang Wang* and *Diqing Jiang* on migrant workers in China and resulting educational inequalities for their children), and from national to international areas as well as across borders. The countries in Northern and Western Europe—the standpoint most of the authors represented in this volume are writing from—as part of the Minority World are today so-called immigration countries with migration flow for socio-economic reasons and because of people fleeing from war and terror into them. In contrast to a country like Australia, which is often described as a ‘classic’ immigration country (see in this volume the chapters by *Jen Skattebol* on everyday experiences of school achievement, migration and neoliberal education policy in Australia as well as the contribution by *Tobia Fattore* on children’s conceptions of ‘otherness’: constructions of the ‘moral self’ and implications for experiences of migration), this has not always been the case in Northern and Western Europe—as a glance at history shows. In the nineteenth and twentieth century there was massive emigration from Europe to North America. That we have so little information on the children and youth of that epoch reflects the fact that at the time the notion of childhood (and youth) as a special phase of life in which children have their own needs and rights was not acknowledged—or if it was, then only for a privileged minority (Clarke 2010, p. 3).

Today as in the past, migration processes are embedded in structures of social inequality. The phenomenon of the ‘global care chains’ (Hochschild 2000) is a prime example. The system of circular migration of women and men from Eastern European countries—nursing the elderly in the ageing Northern and Western European societies—supports structural deficits in our social welfare systems. However, these same women and men are often also parents whose own children and families are staying behind in the countries of origin. The visibility of these migrants’ children, their voices and questions about their well-being, as well as questions of education are still neglected in research on transnational migration processes (Heintz 2013) (see in this volume the chapter by *Beatrix Bukus* on children of circular migrants and the challenges for the European Union with respect to their temporary educational integration; see also the chapter of *Elisabeth Rohr* on ‘children left behind’ in Ecuador and the emotional loss they experience as a result). The term ‘living transnationally’ today may mean that families live physically apart in different parts of the world but are tightly connected with each other through frequent interaction on social media and through travelling. Clearly, we can acknowledge the fact that a transnational family life can be achieved more easily today (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; see in this volume the chapter by *Benjamin Zeitlyn* on transnational living experiences of second generation migrants from Bangladesh). Nonetheless, the ability to ‘live transnationally’ must be seen as a privilege that is not affordable to everybody and every family.

Childhood, Children’s Rights and Own Perspectives

In current debates on the nature of childhood and what it means to be a child, universalist perspectives have argued that the notion of children’s rights implies, on the one hand, a “subjectivity imbued with rights” (Andresen 2013, p. 29) and, on the other, the need of protection for the growing person. This notion of what may be, or should be, common to all children contains a paradoxical element, which becomes especially clear when viewed in a generational perspective on childhood and children’s everyday behavior: Children’s subjectivity, imbued with rights, and children’s agency need to be negotiated in light of the agency of adults (Bühler-Niederberger and Schwittek 2013). This process of negotiating children’s own agency (see here the chapter by *Karin Kämpfe* and *Manuela Westphal* on the topic of children acquiring agency within the context of migration in Germany) is also linked to the issue of protection: Children’s bodily welfare depends at least in part on the care and protection of adults with whom children may have positive or negative relationships (see in this volume the chapter by *Kristen Cheney* on the subject of AIDS orphans and the transformation of kinship, fosterage, and children’s circulation strategies in Uganda). The extent to which children will be able to obtain life skills and enjoy the freedom to develop their own notion of what might be a ‘good life’ (Sen 2009), and thus the well-being of children (Ben Arieh 2000), depend on the nature of their relationships with adults (for present research on