Migration is a multi-fold phenomenon with multiple impacts, good and bad, individuals may be net winners losers, and gains and losses may change over time. The people involved are those who move, those who stay behind, those whom the migrants join, both their immediate families and wider communities at destination and origin. These impacts depend on the duration, location and timing of movement, who migrate, with whom, in how big a migration stream. Definition and data are elusive, but this does not detract from the interest, challenge and value of the enterprise of assessing the well being of children involved in this process. Harttgen and Klasen concentrate on international migration to Europe. They consider persons aged “0-18” (does this mean inclusive of ages 0-17?), though he demographic statistics they quote mostly come in age bands of multiples of 5 years: 0-14, 15-24 etc. The child or ‘youth’ migrant may have crossed an international border on their own, with their parent(s) of have been born in the host country to international migrant parents.

In this paper, in contrast to that of Rossi, international travel for purposes of education is counted as migration and is probably a significant source of movement of the older unaccompanied ‘young’ migrants. Although I would note that the phenomenon of studying away from ‘home’ causes problems with the student’s place of residence even in
domestic population accounting, so this is one source of ambiguity. Other objections to
including the geographical movement of students in current deliberations may be that in
so far as it involves balancing flows of students between European countries on a
temporary basis, it is mutually beneficial and hence not ‘problematic’ (though I would
not suggest that migration has to be a ‘problem’). Another reason to set the movement
of students aside could be that, in so far as they occur at or above the age of 18, moves
for tertiary education are the beginning of ‘adult’ stages of lifecourse migration, part of
the big flux of population, internally as well as internationally of young adults, whether
or not they lead to permanent relocation. At this stage of the lifecourse, people tend
neither to be considered as children nor to have produced children themselves. The
movements of young people which raise prima facie more concern of those of
‘unaccompanied minors’, however defined, and the experiences of young children
accompanying, or joining parents.

The paper also takes within the population of interest, children born to migrant parents in
the host country, who tend to be regarded a part of the ‘immigrant community’,
particularly if they are being brought up in a non-indigenous culture, or language other
than that of the host country. Children of international migrants who are less distinct
from the host community may seem less obviously a group for concern. Perhaps that is
why there is no explicit mention of children only one of whose parents is not native.
‘Mixed’ ethnicity children – a group brought into existence by global population
movement – may nevertheless have their own sets of experiences and problems which it
would be worth taking into account, and which would be diverse. (mixed ethnicity may also in principle involve more than one non-native ethnicity).

Whether or not migrants give birth to children in their destination country will affect whether the migration is long-term. Patterns of settlement (geographically clustered or dispersed) may also vary with the net and gross volume of migration, and the fertility of the migrant population. I suggest that having children in the host country (or bringing them in), reduces the chances of return migration, or delays it.

If the concern is the macro-economic one of how low fertility Europe replaces ‘its’ population, the migrants and their children may provide the solution. It is of more than intrinsic interest to chart the human and social capital of the second generation. As Harttgen and Klasen point out, interest in child well-being is not only instrumental, all children, including migrants have rights that should be monitored. They should not just be regarded as investments in the future labour-force nor as passive dependents upon their parents.

The agency (and independence) of the child arises particularly in the case of solo child migration, travelling without their original families. They may be vulnerable to the exploitation of strangers, others may benefit from international adoption, particularly if well supervised.
Children sometimes assume ‘adult’ responsibilities at an early age, for example if they have a disabled parent. Among some immigrant families children gain a faster command over the host country language than their parents and may take the lead in negotiations with host country authorities.

A counter-example of low child agency could be taken from (probably a small minority of) the Pakistani community in England in the practice of arranging/forcing marriages of teenage girls with bridegrooms from the home country. This can have the dual function for the parental generation of facilitating another immigration permit and preserving cultural traditions. It may also violate the young woman’s rights, and hence illustrates one of the tensions of trans-national living. It forms a spectacular flash point in community and generational relations, but its prevalence is hard to quantify. The UK government attempts to regulate it.

Of the many challenges to data collection in this area, those tapping into trans-national networks and return migration, seem to me to be some of the most interesting and important and elusive.