Future Directions

I focus on three aspects of future work.

Quantitative Data
Both synthesis papers discuss shortcomings in terms of quantitative data, a subject also discussed in the Tienda et al. (2007) briefing paper. One obvious direction would therefore be to push for more and better data.

There is a need for aggregate statistics to give better measures of the numbers of child and youth migrants in each country, together with their origins, and the numbers of adult migrants with child dependents with them (and in their sender countries). The need for survey data sets to include migrant information has also been documented. One problem here is that sample sizes of migrants will often be small. Over-sampling the migrant population (as e.g. in the long-running German household GSOEP) or the ethnic minority population (as e.g. in the new large UK panel survey, the UKHLS) may be a possibility.

Two aspects of a drive for better data: (i) second generation migrants need more measurement. First generation migrant children may struggle to catch up with natives for obvious reasons. But it is more reasonable to expect catch-up by second generation migrant children (those born within the host country); (ii) information is needed on the geographical location of migrant populations within any country. Happily, there is a trend to attach detailed geographical indicators (latitude/longitude co-ordinates) to survey sets (see Gibson and McKenzie 2007). (One possible use for these data would be to look at the internal migration of international migrant families. What are factors that encourage this and how much to migrant children benefit as a result?)

Tienda et al. (2007) mention the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) organised by Macro International in many developing countries as a survey programme that questions on migration could be added to. (NB. DHS data are increasingly supplied with latitude-longitude indicators.) They also mention the INDEPTH network of demographic surveillance sites (DSS) in developing countries, which collect longitudinal data. This too seems an avenue worth exploring, although it
needs to be born in mind that the DSS data refer to very particular locations (although these may be highly relevant, e.g. a Nairobi shanty town).

A final point on data – and one with wider implications for the project as a whole. In pursuit of a child-centric perspective of migration, I suggest that attention is not restricted to the narrow legal definition of a child as aged under 18. See my comments on the Rossi paper on this issue, where I argue that a concern about child wellbeing requires data that goes some way beyond the formal age of majority.

**Qualitative research**

I think it is fair to say that neither synthesis paper makes much use of the findings from qualitative research. But a full understanding of why the well-being of migrant children and youth differs from that of natives, and what to do about it, may require the analysis of qualitative as well as quantitative data. Each approach has its place. So I suggest one future direction is to consider the role of qualitative research within the initiative as a complement to quantitative research. This may also appeal to potential funders. So called ‘mixed methods’ are all the rage. And the vignettes that qualitative data naturally produce can sometimes grab attention in a way that quantitative work may struggle to do.

**Partners**

Partners are clearly needed in a drive for improved data. More and/or better data are not going to emerge simply because they are called for by academics. And partners are also needed for the analysis of existing and new data. The authors of both synthesis papers have given pointers towards potential partners, although typically these are not explicit. I anticipate that the meeting at Bellagio will want to discuss possible partners and how to engage with them.

The relevant international organisations are the first set of potential partners with which to make common cause. In some cases they of course have a key role in the collection or financing of relevant aggregate and survey data. Besides IOM, obvious candidates include the World Bank (especially relevant for LSMS surveys), UNICEF, UNHCR, the UN Population Division, the OECD, and the European Union. In each case, one might think of targeting particular publications that the organisation produces, with a view to encouraging articles that investigate a child-centric view of migration. In the case of the OECD, the team producing the biennial publication
Society at a Glance may be a fruitful contact to make. At the World Bank, a paper in the World Bank Research Observer or the World Bank Economic Review would reach a wide audience. (Among Bank staff, McKenzie’s name is prominent in the Rossi paper.) Rossi will be able to advise on the appropriate persons to try to link up with and publications to try and penetrate at UNICEF. At UNDP, Kevin Watkins, director of the Human Development Report Office, may be worth contacting. UNU-WIDER in Helsinki has a rolling research programme with, I believe, an annual call for new proposals. Others will know better than me where and who to approach at the EU.

Besides international organisations (and of course national governments) and their staff, the aim should be to bring on board individual academic researchers with relevant expertise who would not otherwise have thought to work on this issue. What will encourage them to take part? Appropriate incentives will include attractive conferences and publication opportunities.

References: