Comments on “Well-being of migrant children and youth in Europe”
by Kenneth Harttgen and Stephan Klasen

Hania Zlotnik

This paper is rich but it mostly shows that there is not much information on children and youth in Europe. In chapter 1, it would have been useful to avoid a general discussion of migration and to relate better the types of international migration (such as those presented in table 1) with the situation in which children may find themselves in. Because children are persons below the age of majority, they cannot take legal decisions by themselves and are legally dependent on their parents or guardians. When they migrate internationally, they are typically “tied migrants” in that, generally, they do not make by themselves the decision to migrate. This crucial point is not made at all in chapter 1.

Chapter 2 presents a review of economic theories of migration and of the economic impact of migration. However, it is not successful in showing how these theories are relevant for the migration of children. When mention is made of youth, most of what is said is relevant for all types of economic migrants, whether young or not. In fact, the chapter hardly mentions migration for education, which is one type of migration that involves mostly young people. The review of migration trends could be tightened and should be refocused to discuss the likely relevance of child migration. For instance, during the period of labour migration toward the countries of northern and western Europe, children were likely to constitute very low proportions of migrants but their numbers and certainly their share of migration likely increased once labour migration ceased and family reunification took over.

Chapter 3 should be the core of the paper and it presents some interesting ideas. However, it does not seem to be a comprehensive review of the literature about migrant children, the second generation or young migrants. Most of the studies on those groups have focused on the process of integration, which is not even described in the chapter. Lack of integration may be considered to be similar to social exclusion and the latter certainly gives rise to the former. So the discussion of social exclusion is interesting but it largely ignores migration and its particularities. A discussion of integration is necessary.

Chapter 4 on measurement issues does not do justice to that subject. Although it contains a useful compilation of potential data sources for the analysis of the effects of migration on children, it does not discuss in enough depth how the different data sources might be used to answer specific questions and whether there is sufficient information to identify appropriate comparison groups.

In sum, the paper is interesting but needs to be revised to maintain a consistent focus on children. It also needs careful editing because language is a problem in some places and in others, by citing different authors, the paper seems to contradict itself.