



# Children and Youth Voices on Migration and CRVS

Regional Consultation Report for the 2nd Asia-Pacific GCM Review

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# Introduction

This report presents the voices of 69 children—33 girls and 36 boys—aged 14 to 17 from 10 countries, sharing their experiences and perspectives on migration. Through consultations, they discussed key themes, including the drivers of migration, its impact on children, identity documentation, challenges in civil registration, and recommendations for strengthening civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems. The participating countries were Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The consultations were conducted online, except for children from Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, who faced connectivity challenges in refugee camps and participated in face-to-face focus group discussions.

Facilitated by World Vision International's South Asia and Pacific and East Asia offices, the process began with a preparatory workshop where participants and their mentors were introduced to the objectives of the consultations and key concepts related to migration and CRVS. This session enabled children to share their initial understanding of these topics, ensuring they felt informed and empowered to contribute meaningfully.

To foster open participation, translators supported all children to speak their native languages. During the primary consultation, participants were grouped by country to eliminate language barriers and ensure they could express themselves freely.

	Country	Total Participants	Boys	Girls
1	Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar)	13	6	7
2	Cambodia	7	5	2
3	Mongolia	2	1	1
4	Myanmar	12	4	8
5	Nepal	8	6	2
6	Philippines	7	4	3
7	Sri Lanka	8	3	5
8	Thailand	4	3	1
9	Laos	4	2	2
10	Vietnam	4	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>69</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>33</b>



# Findings

## 1. Reasons For Migration

Facilitated by trained mentors, the participants were grouped according to the countries they reside in. They discussed key migration and civil registration issues in response to guide questions. The groups were asked identical questions.

Children identified multiple drivers of migration, including:

- **Economic opportunities** – Families migrate for better jobs, higher incomes, improved living conditions, or business opportunities (Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand, Laos, Mongolia, Vietnam).
- **Education** – Limited access to quality education in rural areas forces families to relocate (Nepal, Thailand, Laos, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Vietnam).
- **Conflict and political instability** – War, armed conflict, and displacement push families to seek safety (Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka). Jannat, 13, from Cox's Bazar, said, *"We came here because we had to. It was to stay alive. We had to leave everything behind. We crossed the water on just branches. I was so afraid I would fall in."*
- **Disasters and climate change** – Floods, landslides, and environmental degradation force relocation (Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh).
- **Family-related migration** – Parental migration for work, marriage, divorce, or separation affects children's lives (Philippines, Sri Lanka, Cambodia).

## 2. Impact on Children

Participants highlighted both the benefits and challenges of migration.

- **Positive impacts** – Migration can improve family incomes, leading to better living conditions and greater access to resources.
- **Negative impacts** – Family separation leaves children feeling emotionally distressed, lonely, and vulnerable.



*We came here because we had to. It was to stay alive. We had to leave everything behind. We crossed the water on just branches. I was so afraid I would fall in."*

JANNAT ARA, 13, GIRL, COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH

A participant from the Philippines shared, *“To my grandmother, just a little more patience; once I finish college, we’ll be together again. Don’t be too sad.”* (Ador, Philippines). Ador’s parents and sibling live abroad while he remains in the Philippines for his education. He noted how distance weakens family bonds, making communication harder.

However, others, like Thea, expressed gratitude, saying, *“Thank you for sacrificing and working abroad for us.”* (Thea, Philippines). She stays connected with her mother through social media, bridging the gap with frequent messages and video calls.

Migration also disrupts education. Moving to a new place often leads to school dropouts, and many migrant children lack birth certificates, preventing them from enrolling in school or accessing healthcare. Adjusting to new languages, cultures, and environments presents further difficulties.

Participants also identified gender-specific challenges. Girls, in particular, struggle when mothers migrate, leaving them without maternal guidance during puberty.

One participant noted, *“Mothers migrating for work negatively impacts society, as daughters are forced to discuss personal matters with their fathers.”*

Despite these difficulties, the consultations revealed resilience and empowerment among children of migrant workers. Himanshi from Sri Lanka shared, *“Society viewed me as a girl without a father, which pushed me to become self-sufficient, self-protective, and more aware of people’s intentions.”* Gavesha, another Sri Lankan child, reflected, *“With both my parents migrating for work, I had to take responsibility for my siblings. I learned independence at an early age, which I now see as a positive outcome.”*

Children urged governments to improve economic conditions and create local job opportunities to reduce the need for migration. They also called for policies to support migrant families investing remittances in productive assets in destination countries to improve living standards.





### 3. Children of Refugee Background

While migration challenges were common across countries, refugee children faced additional hardships tied to their displacement and restricted mobility.

- Many move frequently within Bangladesh (e.g., Cox's Bazar, Teknaf, and between camps) but cannot travel alone.
- Most fled Myanmar, undertaking dangerous journeys lasting two to three days, facing food shortages, robbery, injury, and even death.

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#### Education, Health, and Well-being

Participants acknowledged the availability of education opportunities and Burmese-language teachers in Bangladesh's refugee camps. However, cultural barriers persist, particularly for girls, as community elders often discourage education beyond the age of 12. They hope for larger schools, more learning materials, and additional female teachers.

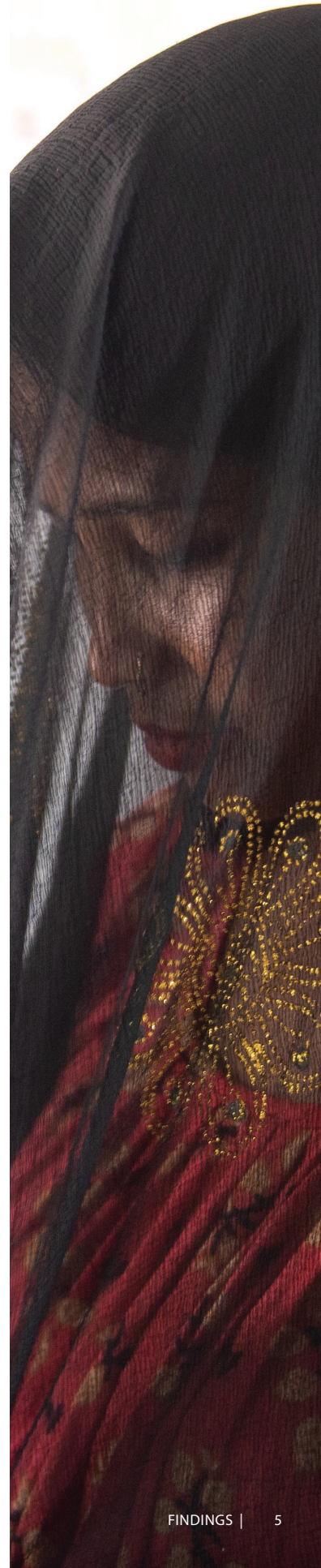
*"I'm happy I can go to school here, even if we don't have desks. It's better than nothing. It's hard to study at night because it's so dark. There aren't enough lights",* expressed Roma, 13, living in the camp. Living conditions in the camps are unsafe. Small, overcrowded rooms offer no privacy, and fire, theft, and lack of lighting increase security risks. Basic infrastructure is inadequate, with toilet shortages and poor sanitation. Participants reported that health conditions were better in Myanmar, with fewer diseases. In the camps, they face high rates of fever, diabetes, high blood pressure, diarrhoea, cholera, dengue, and skin infections. Many dream of becoming doctors, studying abroad, or returning home. Others aspire to learn vocational skills like sewing or teaching.

#### Culture and Identity

Children miss the cultural and religious traditions they enjoyed in Myanmar, including Eid-ul-Azha, Eid-ul-Fitr, and birthday celebrations. Coming-of-age ceremonies for girls, once a cultural norm, are no longer practised in Bangladesh's camps. Participants expressed a profound sense of lost independence and cultural disconnection.

#### Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) for Refugee Children

- **Birth registration** – Vaccination cards serve as family identification, but no formal birth registration exists.
- **Death registration** – Death records are kept informally by camp authorities and communicated via SMS.
- **Marriage registration** – Girls' names are added to camp registers at 18, serving as informal proof of marriage.



#### 4. Challenges Faced During and After Migration

Children across countries reported common struggles:

- **Emotional distress** – Loneliness, separation anxiety, and difficulty adjusting to new caregivers (Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos).
- **Education disruption** – Language barriers, enrolment issues, and financial difficulties (Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Mongolia, Vietnam).
- **Legal identity barriers** – Lack of birth certificates and other civil registration (e.g. national identity) documents restricts access to education, healthcare, and government services with irregular legal status, making children vulnerable. Upon reaching adulthood, stateless people are denied the right to vote (Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh, Mongolia, and Vietnam).



*It's difficult to enrol in school when we don't have legal documents to prove who we are.*

SIDET, 18, BOY, CAMBODIA

A boy named Muslim, 15, in Cox's Bazar Refugee camp, recalled, *"I remember being so hungry. We didn't have any food for days. I was so scared I would die. The journey was terrible. We saw terrible things. I don't want to talk about it."*

Another child from Myanmar, Cho, proposed, *"We need birth registration to be more accessible and affordable."*

Children in Mongolia highlighted a different challenge, *"Marriage certificates are uncommon here. Many couples live together and have children without registering births."* This underscores the need for awareness campaigns on CRVS.





## 5. Recommendations for Strengthening CRVS and Supporting Migrant Children

Child participants provided concrete solutions:



### i. Expand Awareness Programs

Educate parents and communities on the importance of birth and civil registration through government campaigns and local engagement (Cambodia, Nepal, Myanmar, Philippines, Mongolia, Vietnam).



### ii. Implement Digital and Mobile Registration

Establish mobile and online systems to simplify birth and identity registration, especially in remote areas (Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Laos, Mongolia, Vietnam).



### iii. Simplify and Reduce Costs

Remove bureaucratic obstacles and lower fees for birth, marriage, and death registration (Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Vietnam, Mongolia, Bangladesh).



### iv. Link Registration with Healthcare and Education

Ensure automatic birth registration at hospitals and health centres and train officials to improve service efficiency (Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh, Vietnam).



### v. Strengthen Protection for Migrant and Displaced Children

Guarantee legal identity for all children, regardless of parents' status, and create pathways for stateless children to acquire nationality (Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos).

# Conclusion

Across the region, children face significant barriers to accessing services due to migration and lack of legal identity. The absence of birth and other civil registration limits their rights, while family separation disrupts their emotional well-being and education. Governments must take urgent action to simplify civil registration, protect migrant children and ensure every child has a legal identity. Addressing CRVS challenges through policy reforms, digital solutions, and awareness campaigns is critical to securing children's rights and access to essential services.

## Guide questions for consulting children on migration and CRVS:

1. Based on your own experience or what you have heard, what are common reasons for people to migrate out from your place?
2. What do you remember are the changes that happened after the move? (Either of your parents, yourself or someone else) and how did you manage?
3. What do you think about you or your parents moving to a new place? Do you think it's good, bad, or a mix of both?
4. If you could tell adults something about what it's like to move as a child or be left by your parents who need to migrate, what would you say?
5. Can you imagine what it would be like if you didn't have a birth certificate or if you had no documents to prove who your parents are or your name?
6. Why do you think it's important to keep records of things like when people are born or what their name is?
7. Why do you think it's important to keep records of when people get married?
8. Why do you think it's important to keep records of when a parent/relative dies?
9. In what way does your birth certificate make you have a better experience of your right to be protected from violence, right to education, and right to move from one place to another (e.g., to another country)?
10. When someone is born, gets married, or passes away, the government has a way of keeping track of it. How do you think they keep records of these important life events?
11. Why do you think they would want to keep these records?
12. Did you experience or hear from other people about problems they encountered because their birth was not registered, or their parents' marriage was not registered or when someone's death was not registered? What do you think are their concerns?
13. When there are natural disasters like storms, typhoons, and heavy flooding, do you think they affect the recording of one's birth/marriage/death?
14. When there's war, do you think it affects the recording of one's birth//marriage/death?
15. What will make it easy for your parents/guardians to record your birth or your siblings' birth?
16. What will make it easy for you to get your birth registration record?
17. What will make it easy for your parents/guardians/relatives to record their marriage?
18. What will make it easy for your parents/guardians/relatives to record the death of someone in your family?





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We believe a world without violence against children is possible, and World Vision's global campaign ***It takes a world to end violence against children*** is igniting movements of people committed to making this happen. No one person, group or organisation can solve this problem alone, it will take the world to end violence against children.