

## MIGRATE OR STAY BEHIND? GENDERED NEGOTIATIONS REGARDING CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *Migration is a process and result of decision making. Literature on migration decision making tend to focus more on the migrant, thus undermining the decisions of those who remain behind. The paper addresses this gap by examining why certain family members (i.e. wives) remain behind when they have the option of migrating with the husband and the family. Based on a qualitative study with women whose husbands were working in Italy as low or semi-skilled workers, the study identifies that children's education is a primary reason for women to remain at the origin. Perception of these women with regard to the quality, structure and content of school education that they expect, and their values and views regarding the upbringing of children and teenagers justifies their reasons to stay behind.*

**Keywords:** Sri Lanka, international labour migration, remained behind/stay behind women, education

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### Introduction

'Migration' is a process and a result of complex decision making (Baláž et al., 2014). When to migrate, where to migrate, how to migrate and when to return are all important decisions that frames a move. Literature on migration decision making largely focuses and connects with the migrant. Yet migration does not affect only the migrant, but also his/her social networks, mainly families remaining at the origin (Sjaastad, 1962; UN, n.d.). This implies that migration related decisions cannot be connected only to the migrants - who in the family remains at the origin and why are also important issues to be examined.

A distinct feature in present Sri Lanka's international labour migration is the move of semi and low-skilled workers to the Middle Eastern countries (Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, 2017). A characteristic of this particular form of labour migration and the destination is the separation of families for long durations, as most countries, especially those in the Middle East, do not allow families of low and semi-skilled workers to accompany the migrant (Ullah, 2017). This creates a group of family members who will remain at the origin – wives (or husbands) and children (Kong & Meng, 2010; Démurger, 2015). The most significant rational for migration is the betterment of the family (Hedin & Josefsson, 2007; Ullah, 2017); but the most beneficial situation for families is to be together (Mazzucato & Schans, 2008). However, though migration brings positive impacts, especially in financial terms for the family, which is usually the primary reason for the decision to migrate, the long

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**Acknowledgements:** *The author wishes to thank the two anonymous referees for their comments and suggestions.*