



GIRLS ON THE MOVE: ADOLESCENT GIRLS & MIGRATION IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

A GIRLS COUNT REPORT ON
ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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Girls on the Move: Adolescent girls & migration in the developing world

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Girls on the Move

Why girls?

Why urban?

Why migration?

PHOTO: OLLIVIER GIRARD



Study's scope & focus

- Internal migration between ages 15–19
- “Voluntary” moves—not natural disaster or conflict displacement
- Meaning of “volition” and “choice” for girls
- Strongly evidence based

The evidence

- More than 150 DHS surveys
- More than 60 census micro-samples
- 16 commissioned research reports
- Extensive literature review
- But more is needed...

What we'll talk about today


- Characteristics of migrant girls
- Benefits of migration
- Migration from a girl's perspective
- Current programs and policies
- Action agenda

Many urban girls are recent migrants

A photograph of two young girls in school uniforms sitting at a desk. They are looking thoughtful, with their hands resting on the desk. The girl on the right has her hand to her chin. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Population censuses: **5% to 30%**

DHS: Higher percentages;
up to **80%** in some countries



What do we know
about these girls?

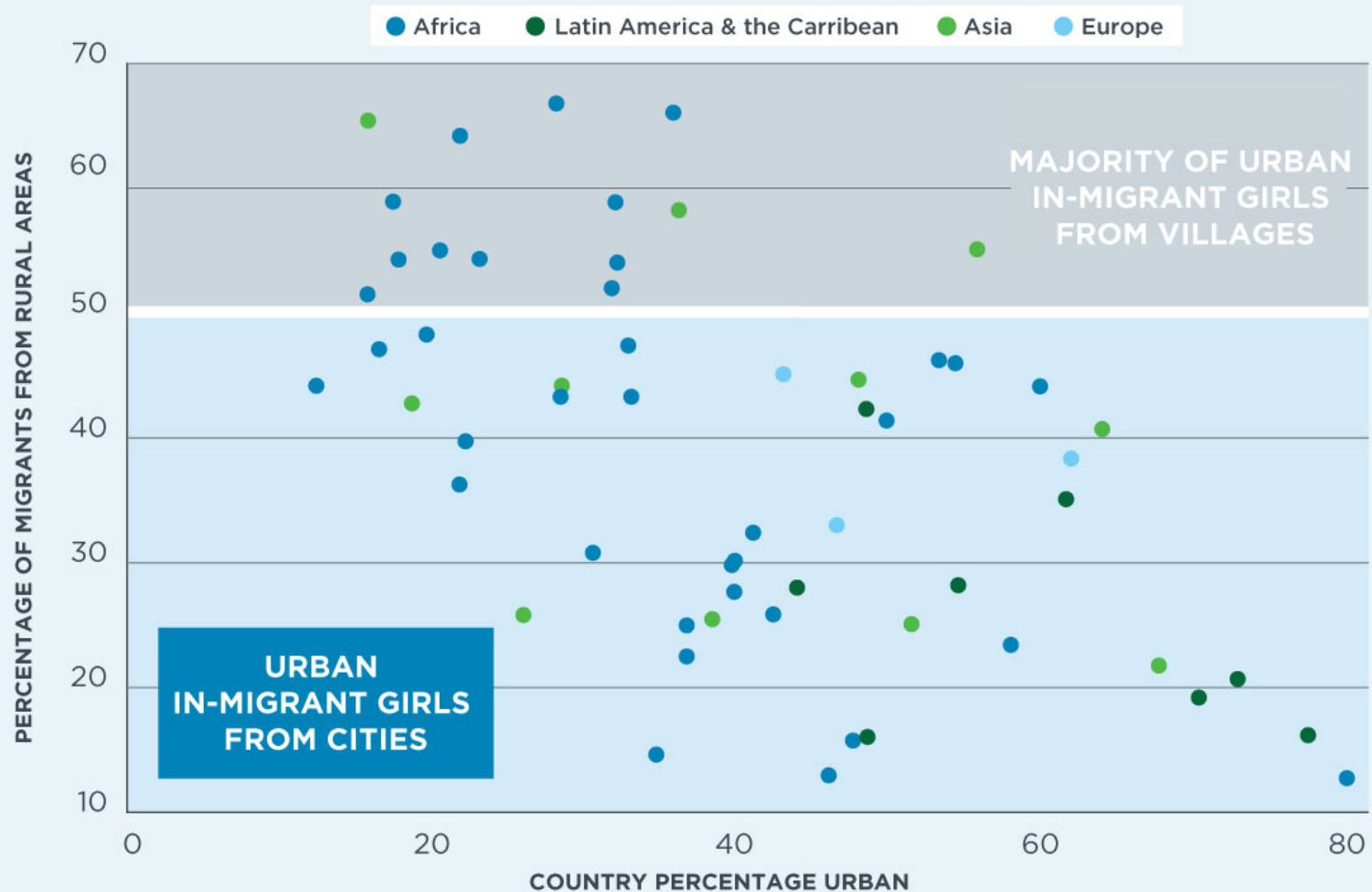
Who moves?

Why do they move?

PHOTO: JANE HAHN

Migration: rural-to-urban vs. urban-to-urban

Percentage of urban in-migrants who come from rural villages, girls aged 15-19



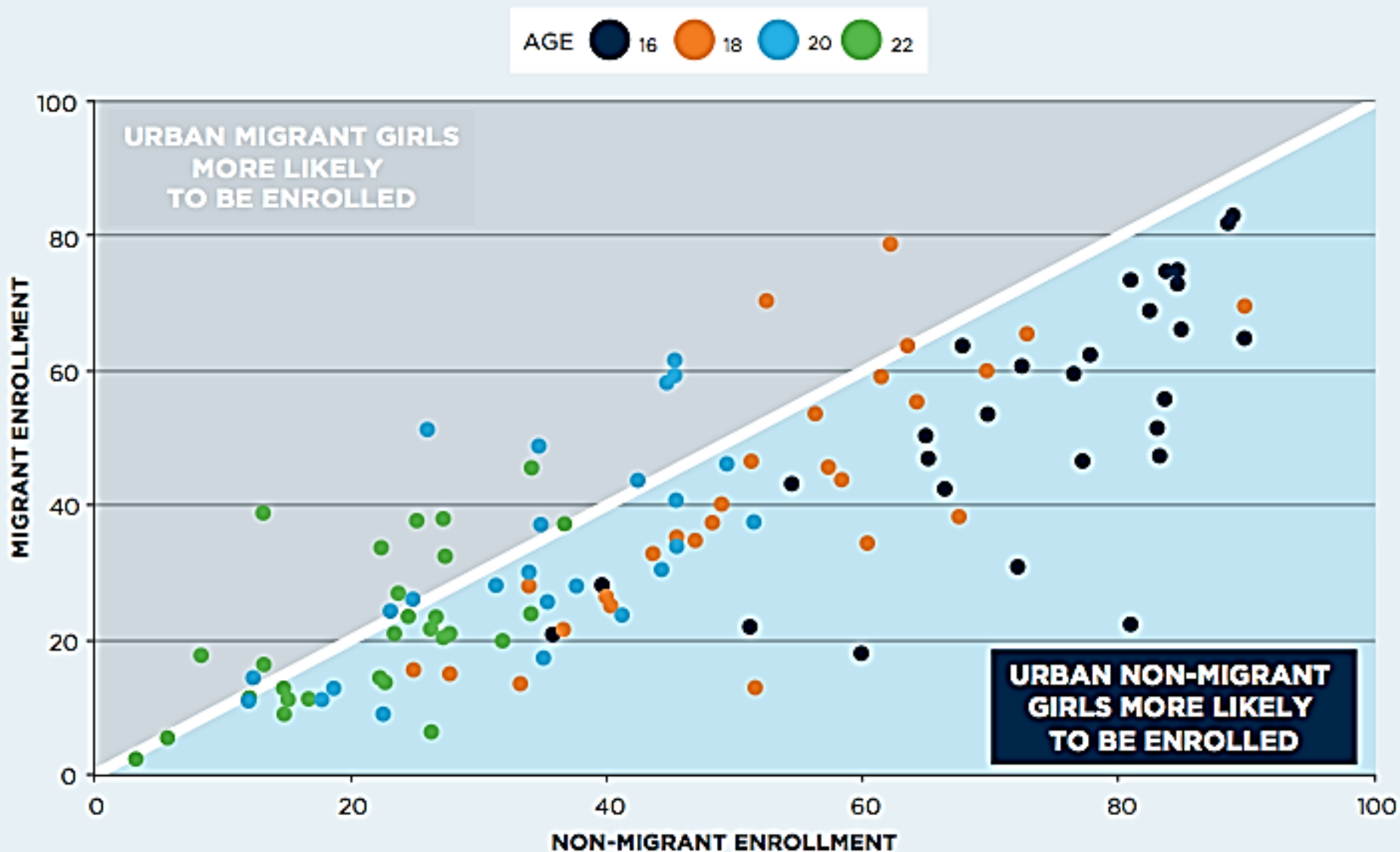
A photograph of three young girls sitting at a wooden desk in a classroom. They are all looking at open books on the desk. The girl on the left is wearing a red headscarf and a blue long-sleeved shirt. The girl in the middle is wearing a dark brown headscarf. The girl on the right is wearing a blue and black striped headscarf and an orange jacket. They appear to be engaged in a learning activity. The background is slightly blurred, showing other parts of the classroom.

Migration can provide:

**New opportunities for
schooling and skill building**

PHOTO: MELODIE MCDANIEL

Enrollment levels: Urban migrant and non-migrant girls



Migration defined as a cross-province move or the equivalent.

Source: IPUMS

A young woman with a thoughtful expression, wearing a vibrant, patterned headscarf and a matching dress with yellow, purple, and white designs. She is looking off to the side against a dark, textured wall. The image is framed by a green border at the top and bottom, and an orange border at the bottom left.

Migration can bring:

Greater autonomy

Greater voice for girls within families

PHOTO: JANE HAHN

A photograph of four women sitting together in a room with a textured, light-colored wall. One woman on the left is wearing a white shirt and a black headscarf with white patterns. Another woman next to her is wearing a pink headscarf. A third woman in the center is wearing a light blue polo shirt. The fourth woman on the right is wearing a black top and is smiling while looking towards the others. There is a wooden table with a blue patterned tablecloth in the background.

Safe migration can lead to:

Prosperity for individuals and families

More equitable gender norms

PHOTO: MELODIE MCDANIEL

Ideally, what would migration look like?

- Decision to stay or go: informed choice
- Migrant girls protected en route and at destination
- Governments: appreciate benefits of migration and urbanization

But where are we today?

- Migrant girls not well-informed of urban risks
 - Do not know rights as workers
- Protective structures not yet in place
 - Workplace safety
- Governments: view migration with anxiety & hostility
 - Forcibly evict migrants & slum-dwellers



Weaknesses of programs & research

Fixate on **extreme risks**

Ignore more **common risks**

Overlook potential **benefits**

Deciding to move

“I decided myself to leave and come here because I want to help my family because they are poor.”

***Phuong, 18,
Vietnam***

PHOTO: BUSSARAWAN TEERAWICHITCHAINAN



Deciding to stay

“I would like to go back but not without any skills or a proper job here in Accra. Even if I get money now, I will not return until I have had some skills. If I return without any skills, I would have wasted my time here.”

Zuera, 19, Accra

Before departure

- Returned migrants' influence
- Media's glittery portrayal of city life
- Unrealistic expectations

“When she came back, she was very beautiful and she had money, so I knew no matter how difficult life might be in the cities, you can’t compare it with village life. So, I was waiting for an opportunity to come to the city.”

Sabina, 17, Tanzania

In transit

- Possibly riskiest part of migration
- Distance matters
- Most girls travel with companion
- Importance of money, information

“The difficulty I got was where to spend the night for the first nights, since I didn’t know anyone and I really didn’t know where I was going...Bad boys stole my bag, but fortunately...I had kept the money in my underpants.”

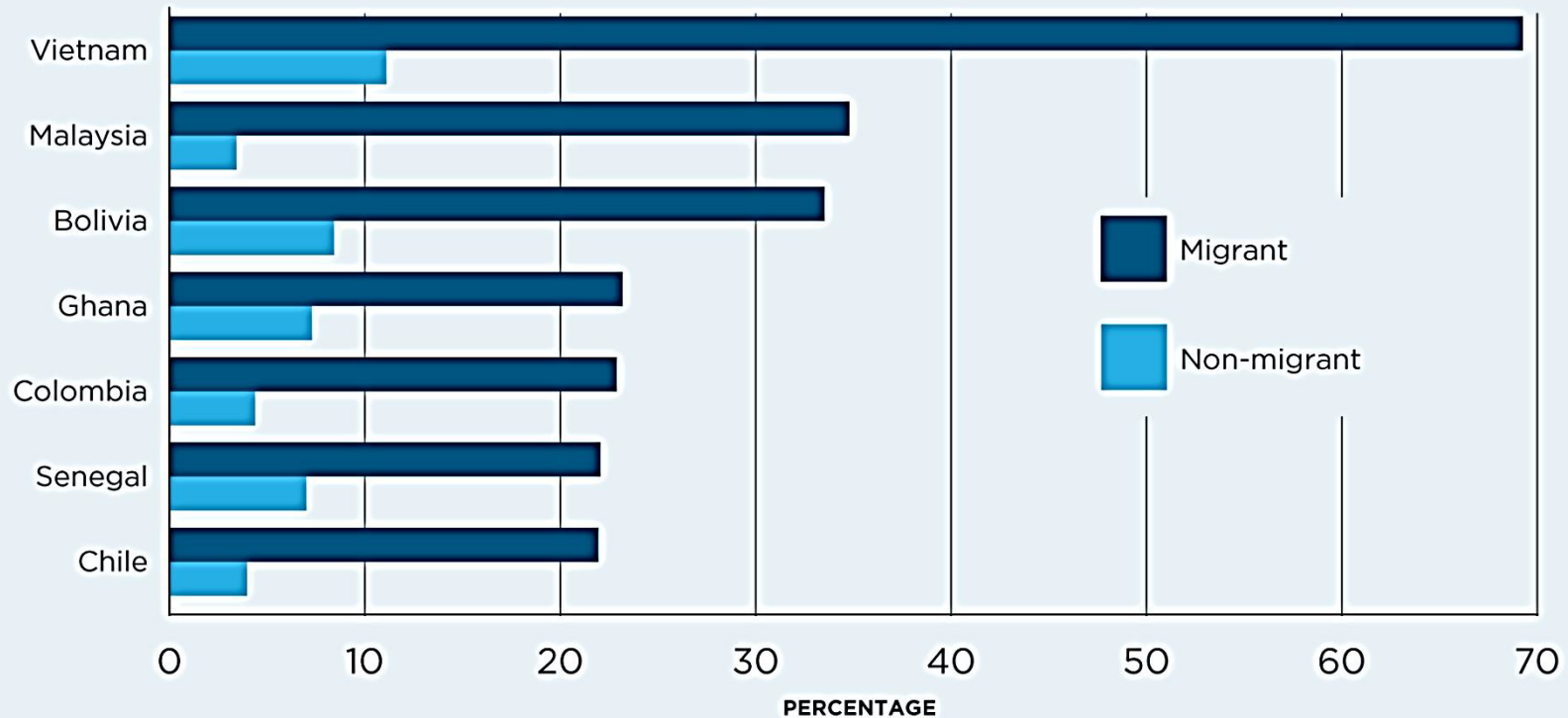
Zamda, 16, Tanzania

Upon arrival

- Settling in phase
- Neighborhood: slums though not for all
- Social services, but no guaranteed access
- Social support critical

Migrant girls are less likely to live with family

Percentages of urban girls aged 15-19 unrelated or distantly related to household head, by migrant status



Migrants defined as cross-province movers.

Source: IPUMS

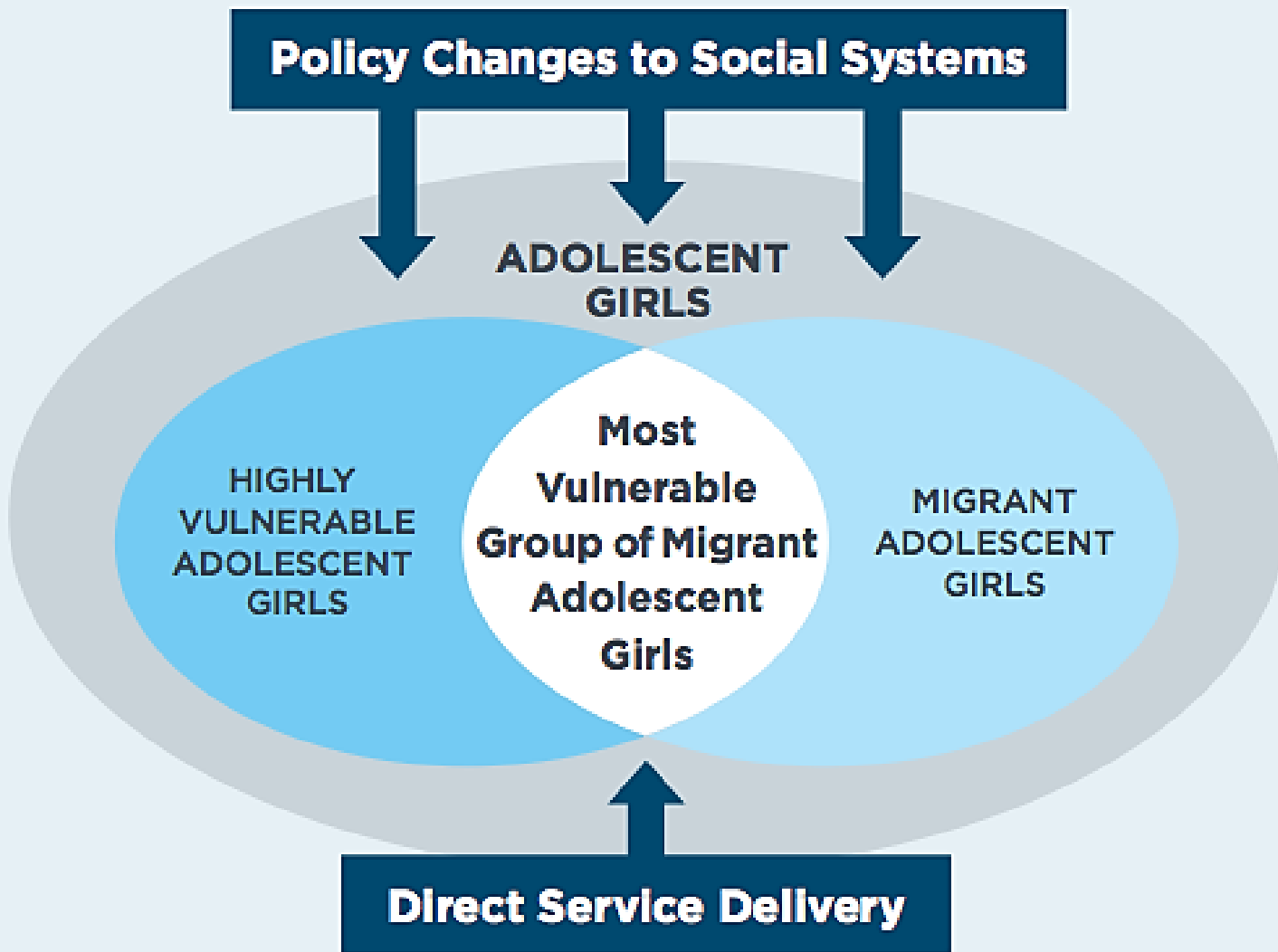
Limited employment options

- The “3 Ds”
- Service industry
 - Domestic labor frequent
- “Entertainment” industry
- Factories



PHOTO: SHARAT CHOWDHURY

Migrant adolescent girls' diversity requires varied responses



Current programs and policies

- Small scale
- Reactive not proactive
 - Building girls' protective assets?
- Internal migrants overlooked

Take action for migrant girls



Create opportunities for connections

Fill critical evidence gaps

Increase migrant girls' visibility through policy and advocacy

PHOTO: MELODIE MCDANIEL

What would success look like?

A woman with dark hair, wearing a blue patterned vest over a dark top, is focused on weaving on a traditional wooden loom. The loom is made of light-colored wood and has many vertical threads. The background shows a rustic setting with stone and wood.

**Girls
migrate
for the
right
reasons**

**Transit
period
less
risky**

**Migrant girls
safely &
rapidly
included in
social
structures &
programs**



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