Migration experts have noted for more than a decade that the vast majority of migrant journeys are best classified as “mixed migration”. The motives propelling people to leave their homes are typically varied and multi-dimensional, a combination of immediate triggers and less proximate desires and aspirations. This observation applies to the migration of children, whether accompanied or traveling alone, as much as it does to the migration of adults. Most children leaving home are departing from stressful or intolerable circumstances but are also intent on exploring new opportunities or taking advantage of apparently enticing chances. And yet, the international, regional and domestic migration regimes governing these movements are dominated by dichotomous concepts drawn from a legal regime crafted 75 years ago – refugee/economic migrant, legal/illegal, trafficked/smuggled, genuinely related or not. Child migrants with complex, multifaceted and perhaps changing motives are thus forced into legal straightjackets that correspond to official administrative silos processing their applications but that ill serve their protection needs. The “surge” of Central American child migration to the US over the Summer of 2014 and the exodus of Syrian and other middle eastern refugees into Europe including unprecedented numbers of children over Spring/Summer/Fall 2015 have highlighted the breakdown of the established migration paradigm and the urgent need for a new one. What should the central elements of a new child migration paradigm be? What elements of the current system could be reformed? What new structures and policies are essential for progress on these issues?

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