

Children on the Move: Forced displacement and Unsafe Migration





ChildFund Alliance

ChildFund Alliance is a global network of 11 child-focused development and humanitarian organizations reaching more than 32 million children and their family members in 70 countries.

Our members work to end violence and exploitation against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children, families and communities to create lasting change.

Our commitment, resources, innovation and expertise serve as a powerful force to transform the lives of children around the world.

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Cover image: Honduran children
and their families on the move.

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Addressing Forced Displacement and Unsafe Migration

No matter the reason for unsafe migration or forced displacement, children, families, and communities face a devastating human, social, and economic toll when fleeing their homes within or across borders.

As part of our child-focused and humanitarian work, ChildFund Alliance works to address the many challenges faced by vulnerable populations in the context of migration, in a multiplicity of ways. Our rights-based approach to community development programming ensures that all children, no matter their location or situation, are served by our programs.

Specific challenges presented by forced displacement¹ and unsafe migration² have increased in light of increasing conflicts, climate crises, and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, which are still ongoing. Children, their families, and communities face overwhelming obstacles and dangers when they are forced to move from their homes into more perilous situations.



A refugee mother with her two daughters inside their dormitory at a ChildFund-supported shelter in Mexico

Central and South America: An Escalating Challenge

Historically, in Central and Southern America, there has always been movement of people across borders, particularly towards economic/employment centers (e.g., the United States, Costa Rica, Panama, Chile and Brazil).

However, in the last five years, particular situations of forced displacement and unsafe migration have generated vast numbers of children migrating – with or without their families – including within their country’s borders.

The number of children affected by unsafe migration in Latin America and the Caribbean is expected to hit 3.5-million in 2023.³ This number, which includes children on the move, as well as those living in host communities, represents a 47 percent increase compared to 2021.

Those who are making the journey are often at risk of danger, abuse and exploitation, as well as additional trauma due to apprehension, detention, and/or deportation. As shown in the graphic (previous page), numerous push factors have been contributing to this escalation: Conflicts,⁴ Violence and Abuse,⁵ Discrimination (in both host and receiving countries),⁶ Climate Change,⁷ and Economic Hardship.⁸

Additionally, there are pull factors toward certain countries or regions based on the perception of better economic opportunities and the desire for family

reunification.

These factors are likely to increase over the next few years, pushing many more children, young people, and their families toward unsafe migration and forced displacement and increasing their risk of harm as they do so. Exacerbating the risks in movement are violence along the transit route:

- National policies within sending, transit, and destination countries that increase harm/risks to migrating populations;

- Criminal networks that target people for illegal routes/unsafe passages;
- Increased separation of families;
- Insufficient personal resources (financial and social); and
- Lack of safety, public healthcare, and public education services.

All of these risks result in harm to vulnerable families and their children. For younger children in particular, these risks can be severely traumatizing, and result in life-long harms.



ChildFund’s Work in the Region

ChildFund Alliance members have a long presence in Central and Southern America, having worked in at least eight countries in the region for more than three decades implementing development and humanitarian programs.

In addition to individual community development and emergency response work, members have joined together on a number of projects to address the pressing needs of children on the move. Programs address social inclusion, access to education, health services, community-based child protection, and livelihoods to support families along migratory routes. Particular attention is paid to high-risk factors for children and their families, considering the needs of both temporary and permanent migrants.

<p>Prevention: addressing the push/pull factors creating unsafe migration</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing home and school-based violence and gender-based violence. School-based programs also assist in identifying children at risk of unsafe migration. • Ensuring children and families at risk of unsafe migration are able to access basic services. • Improving the quality and accessibility of vocational training, access to decent jobs, and entrepreneurship for young people and head of households.
<p>Transit: addressing the humanitarian needs and protection risks during migration/forced displacement</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting responsive mechanisms in place to meet humanitarian needs such as response teams with legal, medical and psychological support. For example, in Mexico, rapid response teams handled 39,717 migrants in less than one year (Dec 2021-Oct 2022). • Working in close cooperation with local authorities to ensure tailored packages for children and families to meet their specific needs (e.g., on entry/re-entry to a country). • Ensuring that duty bearers provide basic water, sanitation and hygiene services that meet the migrating family’s needs along routes.
<p>Integration and re-integration: supporting children and their families to reintegrate to home communities/integrate into host communities in the long-term</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certifying qualifications in host/destination countries and training for self employment. • Access to entrepreneurial funds/decent jobs/training opportunities, etc. • Ensuring access to education for returnee and migrant children and creating a welcoming environment through training and support to teachers and students. • Building social networks between migrant/returnees and host communities to address stigma and discrimination, and developing protective communities for children. • Addressing violence and gender issues in the community, particularly for integrating women and children who are at risk. • Advocacy with local authorities for child protection with effective mechanisms. • Developing information dissemination campaigns on available support services for returning and displaced families to facilitate reintegration.

Programming in action

From awareness raising to decision-making: developing children and youth's capacity to make informed decisions in the Confio project.

Evaluation evidence from the Confio project demonstrated the importance of going beyond information provision to community discussions on the root causes and risks of unsafe migration.

The project, also known as PICMCA, or Preventing Irregular Child Migration in Central America, was jointly launched in 2017 by ChildFund Alliance members Children Believe (Canada), Educo (Spain), and ChildFund International (USA).

The four-year program, largely funded by the Canadian government, was designed to contribute to the prevention of irregular migration of children, adolescents, and youth in five countries—El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Mexico.

The project focused on protective factors by tackling the violence and lack of opportunities that push them into unsafe migration. It also empowered young people through investments in education, entrepreneurship, and mentoring programs aimed at helping them make better informed decisions for their futures.

As a key participant stated in the evaluation: "Confio was definitely, a high-value project, where very sensitive issues were discussed (about the risks of migration) and being able to develop in young people the desire to start a business, or get a job was a propeller to make them aware of the opportunities that exist."

PICMCA employed a "youth-teaching-youth" model to educate and encourage children to become leaders in their communities.



The promotion of leadership was a decisive factor to be able to promote, lead, encourage and build decision making among the youth, and for them to take up leadership in their communities: "They felt part of a common effort, and I think that has been another determining factor because they saw their opinion reflected. In the practice of the community or in its family, it was not so."

Having role models of economic and educational or social success in their home community and fully understanding the risks, threats and myths contributing to unsafe migration allowed young people to make better decisions and to successfully participate in their communities.

“ For me, this is the first experience as an active participant in a project. They give us the tools to help other young people, giving them knowledge and sharing experiences. — *Young person from Honduras*

Putting the 'Triple Nexus' approach into action: supporting displaced people in Peru and Ecuador

The Triple Nexus is defined by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as “interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace actions” with the aim of “strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity.”⁹

Here are three ways it’s being put into action in the EU funded Lives in Dignity project (2022-2024).

1. A structured network of local actors across the borders

The Lives in Dignity project will facilitate rapid exchange of information between stakeholders in Peru and Ecuador. Coupled with outputs such as the community developed profiles and plans, this encourages complementarities among stakeholders and eases the transition from material assistance to early recovery and community development.

The project will use tools including the Community Protection Approach and the Individual Protection Approach and the Information Management System (IMS) (see box on p9).

2. Addressing peacebuilding

The targeted vulnerable population (Women, LGBTIQ+ and migrants) have leadership at all stages of the project cycle. Specific actions to address their concerns and to build connections with host communities/services are facilitated through the coordination structures.

IMS monitoring and applying the results of research (see point 3) will facilitate real time adaptation to respond to emerging needs as well as the underlying conflict drivers.

3. Research components

Lives in Dignity partner academic institutions¹⁰ will investigate:

- (i) the dynamics of vulnerability in the agricultural, industrial and tourism sectors in the border areas of Peru and Ecuador;
- (ii) the barriers to accessing education and training for foreign populations, particularly of vulnerable groups: women, LGBTIQ+ and migrants; and
- (iii) trafficking in human beings across the border between Peru and Ecuador and the main protection risks they face in the movement and integration into local communities.

These studies will be crucial to understanding barriers/challenges for migrant populations, facilitating inter-institutional and cross border solutions, and improving policymakers’ evidence-based decision making.



The Community Protection Approach (CPA): a successful methodology tested in multiple countries

The CPA was developed by ChildFund Alliance member We World in coordination with ECHO and has been successfully implemented in the Middle East (Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon), North Africa and Sahel Region (Libya and Burkina Faso), and in Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua). The CPA has also been contextualized in the South America region (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) – and will be used in Ecuador and Peru for the Lives in Dignity European funded project.

What is it?

CPA is a rights-based approach that facilitates community and stakeholder ownership and coordination. It comprises a context-specific process of assessment and analysis to analyze risks and community resilience. Through the CPA, the community analyzes its needs and vulnerabilities, and regularly reviews and identifies actions. Communities are the owners of the process and the holders of its outputs: the Community Profiles (CPs) and Protection Response Plans (PRPs).

The Individual Protection Approach (IPA) is also a system to identify and assess people whose immediate physiological, safety, and dignity needs have not been met. The IPA facilitates the linking of rights-holders to service providers and provides real-time analysis on gaps and challenges faced to access services. The two approaches use a Web based Information Management System that facilitates connections and referrals in a specific location whilst guaranteeing data protection and accountability. Particular benefits of this approach are: the ability to capitalize on a range of resources with community leadership, addressing the protection risks/drivers of migration, and ensuring appropriate targeting for the most vulnerable, with examples of impact from around the world.



The Lives in Dignity project provides support to families in Ecuador and Peru

How ChildFund Alliance members are adding value

Maximize the entry points

ChildFund Alliance members have a long-term presence in the target countries and this has enabled them to identify the best 'entry points' for assistance in a given context.

This might include: identifying the right local partners for sustainability; supporting access and appropriate technical support to the child protection services; ensuring access to health and education systems for child migrants; or maximizing their organizational relationships and reputations to advocate to local and national governments to address policy needs.

ChildFund Alliance members are also able to establish partnerships with the academic and business communities and leverage their long-term support for schools and community groups.

Expand economic and education opportunities

This is key to successful prevention and integration outcomes. ChildFund Alliance members are continuously learning and adapting programs, such as those in Ecuador and Peru:

Ecuador: ensuring Venezuelan women migrating with their children could access training courses that included childcare provision, permitting women to focus on learning about child safety and maximizing their limited 'free' time.

Peru: providing seed capital to women/youth alongside entrepreneurial skills training, having learned that this is far more effective in applying new skills in 'real time' and leading to more successful business outcomes.

Invest in and provide thought leadership

For example, contributing to the analysis and implementation of the 'Triple Nexus' approach as outlined in the example Lives in Dignity project. Actively applying a Triple Nexus approach is a critical challenge for donors, national governments, civil society, and other actors.¹¹ For this reason, a study such as the one by ChildFund Alliance member WeWorld *Applying the Triple Nexus between Humanitarian, Development, and Peace in the Context of Migration Flows from Venezuela* is invaluable.



Training on vocational skills and entrepreneurship is a key part of the Confo Project, and has enabled Francis in Nicaragua to establish her own business

Endnotes

1 UNHCR defines 'forced displacement' as follows: people displaced "as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence or human rights violations". UNHCR Global Trends – Forced Displacement in 2014". UNHCR. 18 June 2015

2 For this capacity brief we have taken unsafe migration to mean – when children and their families migrate in such a way that it exposes them to multiple harm and risks, particularly all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. Our responses seek to mitigate those harms and empower children and families to make informed choices and enhance their self protection. For in-depth analysis of relevant terms, definitions and contexts of unsafe child migration see here: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/wom3.18>

3 <https://www.unicef.org/lac/en/press-releases/latin-america-and-caribbean-about-3.5-million-children-to-be-affected-by-migration-next-year>

4 For example: conflicts at political/macro level including state and inter-state conflicts, violence, criminal activity and politicised situations with ineffective policies, economic consequences and institutionalised violence.. The impact is highly gendered with differing effects on young men and women, also depending on race and ethnicity.

5 For example, at a family community level -with high levels of gender based violence, as well as gang recruitment and violence which primarily affects young men and women as victims

6 For example: the age, gender, sexual orientation and disability status of migrant children and the way they migrate within a family or group has a huge impact on both their capacity to move, the risks and discrimination they face. It also may affect their decisions to move and their trust in the state apparatus to protect them.

7 For example worse than usual hurricanes in 2020 contributed to large movements , as well as the economic impact of failed harvests and environmental degradation combined with the social and economic impact of Covid 19 and the attendant pandemic mitigation measures.

8 For example, across the regions remittances have gone down and economic pressures have increased. The economic situation at macro level but also micro-household level has driven children, young women and men and their families to seek out new economic opportunities.

9 See here: <https://devinit.org/resources/donors-triple-nexus-lessons-united-kingdom/introduction/> for a useful overview of the history and terminology used to describe this approach.

10 University of Azuay (UDA), IDEHPUCP - Instituto de Democracia y Derechos Humanos - Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú –Lima

11 See DAC Commitment for example of how global stakeholders have committed to this approach: <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/oecd-legal-5019>



Nineteen year-old Ledys Osorto (right) is the owner of Delicias Caf'Arte, and has benefited from employment training offered through the Confio project in Nicaragua

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Every child deserves to live a life free from violence.

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