

Preventing Irregular Child Migration in Central America

December 4, 2018

More than 60 representatives of civil society, UN agencies and government joined with ChildFund Alliance and ChildFund members from Canada, Spain and the United States on December 4, 2018 for our program, *The Protection of Children at Risk of Irregular Migration*, hosted in partnership with UNICEF.



The forum, held in New York City, provided an important platform for sharing the early progress of the *Preventing Irregular Child Migration in Central America* initiative led by Christian Children's Fund of Canada (CCFC), in partnership with ChildFund International (U.S) and Educo (Spain). The \$15.2 million project, launched in March 2017, has been examining the dangers faced by children and youth at risk of irregular migration in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua; its root causes; and measures to keep them safe.

The two-hour programming began with a brief luncheon reception and video presentation at the Scandinavia House in Midtown Manhattan. ChildFund Alliance Secretary General Meg Gardinier opened with an overview of the program, outlining why it is so important to address this crisis at a time when irregular migration is at its highest levels.



Marta Santos Pais, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children spoke next, providing insightful and powerful remarks on the rights of migrant and refugee children, and the risks associated with irregular migration. She noted that violence is the most pressing reason why people leave their home countries, and that among children, irregular migration is an expression of their frustration and desperation.

Cornelius Williams, Associate Director of Child Protection from UNICEF's Programme Division spoke next about the high-level drivers of migration and UNICEF's response, emphasizing that preserving family unity is crucial for children's well-being and protection of their rights. He shared that while seemingly unfathomable; the harsh reality is that an adolescent dies every seven minutes in the world due to an act of violence.



Philip Tanner, Senior Director for Policy & Government Relations at Christian Children's Fund of Canada then moderated an engaging conversation with Erin Kennedy, Director of Advocacy and Partnerships at ChildFund International; Alicia Ávila de Parada, Country Director for Educo in El Salvador; and Angelica Trejo Leon, Project Lead at ChildFund Mexico.

Erin discussed ChildFund International's policy advocacy response and programmatic work to provide training for legal professionals at the border. Alicia and Angelica addressed the devastating effects of irregular migration; its root causes; and how the project is helping to keep children safe through preventative measures such as skills training, safe spaces, and policy and program changes in government. Attendees also were able to hear the perspectives and experiences of impacted youth, shared via videotaped interviews during the program.



Following the panel discussion, representatives of the Government of El Salvador and the International Organization for Migration closed out the event with brief statements, followed by an audience question and answer session. ChildFund Alliance Secretary General Meg Gardinier then thanked participants and attendees for their perspectives and insightful contributions to such an important discussion. In closing, she stated that irregular migration is unquestionably a complex issue warranting continued dialogue and action, noting it would be the focal point of UN Member States and others at the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in Morocco December 10-11.

Editor's Note: The attendance of so many like-minded partners at this event is a testament to both the importance of this pressing humanitarian crisis, an also to the shared commitment of child advocates to improve the well-being of children at risk throughout the world. In the weeks ahead, ChildFund Alliance will share a white paper on The Protection of Children at Risk of Irregular Migration, in addition to a video recording of the program.