

Children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility in Northern Central America, Mexico, and Panama.

Specialized research newsletter REDLAC Protection Group





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Children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility in Northern Central America, Mexico and Panama¹

INTRODUCTION

Children and adolescents (CA) represent one of the main profiles of people in human mobility globally. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as "every human being under 18 years of age. In this regard, children in human mobility accounted for up to 12% of the total international migrant population in 2019. According to the latest available data for 2020, in Latin America, 15% of the migrant population is under 18 years of age. Likewise, according to global displacement trends conducted by UNHCR by the end of 2020, there were 211,500 internally displaced children and adolescents, 29,304 asylum seekers and 270 refugees in the countries of Northern Central America.²

The relevance and visibility of the dynamics of human mobility has increased in the last decade as a consequence of the migration and asylum policies agreed upon by the countries of the region. The forced displacement of children and adolescents from the countries of Northern Central America is the result of the confluence of multidimensional factors: high levels of violence and insecurity, lack of economic opportunities, lack of inclusive policies, and the impact of natural hazards and climate change and disasters that often cause various unaddressed vulnerabilities. Family reunification with relatives living in the United States and expectations for a better life are also elements that influence the initiation of displacement. The main protection risks to which this population profile is exposed include gender-based violence and human trafficking for sexual and labor exploitation.³

Disaggregation of data on refugee and migrant children by age and gender, and information on whether or not they are accompanied by a caregiver, family member or legal guardian is crucial to identify different levels of vulnerability and protection needs of this population throughout the human mobility cycle.

This generation of evidence faces multiple challenges in the field. On the one hand, the protection of data concerning migrant and refugee children establishes the need to collect information guaranteeing the privacy, dignity and well-being of children and adolescents. In addition, data are sometimes incomplete, unreliable or duplicated, as unaccompanied children and adolescents who are separated from their legal guardians or lose them during the journey may be undetected, evade registration by the authorities or declare that they are over 18 years of age or are accompanied by a "supposed" legal guardian in order to continue their journey and not remain in custody.

The proliferation of different definitions for each age category and the disparity of criteria for recording data are other obstacles to adequately characterizing children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility.⁴

This *Special Research Bulletin* addresses the factors that trigger the flow of children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility to the United States and Mexico, the protection risks they face during their disembarkation cycle, the migration agreements and policies that regulate this phenomenon, and the institutional responses and those of humanitarian organizations to guarantee their comprehensive protection.

KEY MESSAGES

- 1 In Northern Central America, Panama and Mexico, the migratory flow of children and adolescents has increased its relative weight over the last five years.

- 2 The migration policies of the countries analyzed have made adjustments to adapt to this change in the migration patterns of children and adolescents. These efforts have focused on the reception of deported children and adolescents, but not on the promotion of a holistic integration process. There is a gap between the formal mechanisms for monitoring the reintegration of deported children and adolescents, the people who decide to return voluntarily due to the lack of opportunities and access to services due to their migratory status, and their effective implementation.

- 3 Violence and insecurity, lack of protection, lack of educational and economic opportunities, the impact of climate change and the socioeconomic effects of Covid-19 are multidimensional and interdependent factors that converge in the displacement of this population profile.

- 4 The perception of changes in migration policies in the United States affects the migration patterns of children and adolescents from the countries of Northern Central America.

This is the Special Research Bulletin on children and adolescents in situations of human mobility in Northern Central America, Panama and Mexico; an initiative of the REDLAC Regional Protection Cluster, led by the Norwegian Refugee Council, and supported by AC-NUR and ECHO. The analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with humanitarian organizations and academic institutions working in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama and Mexico, as well as monitoring of official statistics, press, academic and civil society studies. The document has input from a variety of Protection Cluster organizations, although it does not necessarily reflect the position of each organization: Spanish Red Cross - El Salvador; Cristosal Foundation; Plan International - El Salvador; UNICEF - El Salvador; Casa Alianza; National Human Rights Commissioner - Honduras; Coordinating Committee of Private Institutions for Children, Adolescents and Youth and their Human Rights (COIPRODEN); Dirección Nacional de la Niñez y la Familia; Jóvenes contra la Violencia; Plan Internacional - Honduras; UNHCR - Guatemala; Asociación Pop Nui - Guatemala; Casa del Migrante; Child Fund - Guatemala; Coordinadora Institucional de Promoción por los Derechos de la Niñez (CIPRODENI); EDUCO; Plan Internacional - Guatemala; Programa de Atención, Movilización e Incidencia por la Niñez y Adolescencia (PAMI); Save the Children - Guatemala; Sistemas Municipales de Protección; UNICEF - Guatemala; Médicos Sin Fronteras - Panama; Organización Internacional para las Migraciones - Panama; RET Américas - Panama; Save the Children - Mexico; Kids in Need of Defense - Mexico; Organización Internacional para las Migraciones - Mexico; Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes-México; Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados - Mexico; Albergue Monseñor Romero.



REGIONAL CONTEXT

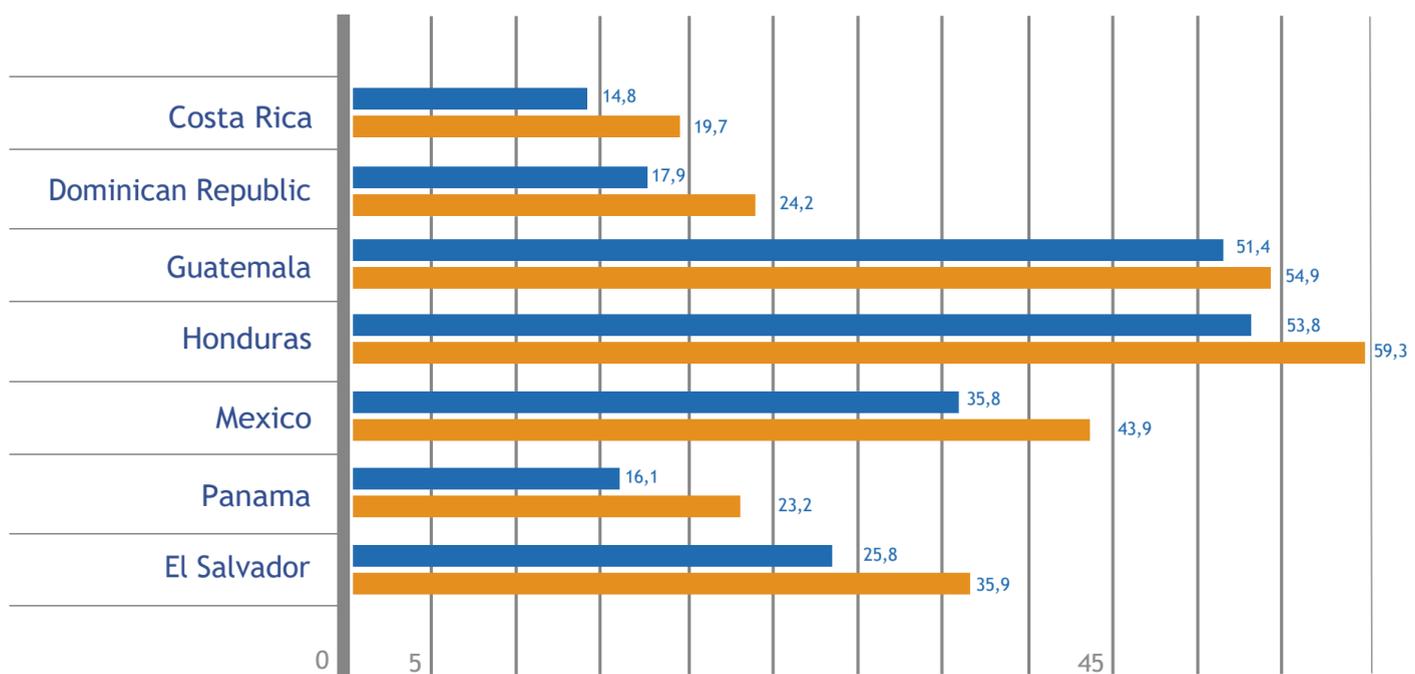
Mixed movements of children and adolescents from northern Central American countries to the United States and Mexico is not a recent phenomenon, although it has varied in intensity and magnitude over the last few decades.

The incidence of multiple factors, both subjective and circumstantial, explains the continuity of these displacements, which fall into two main categories:

Social inequality and unemployment

The impact of Covid 19 has aggravated the levels of poverty and inequality in Central America and Mexico. Poverty in these countries has increased by 7.4% compared to the situation before the pandemic: 35.9% of the inhabitants of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama and the Dominican Republic were poor at the end of 2020.

Percentage of population below \$5 a day before and after Covid-19



Poverty before Covid-19

Poverty after Covid-19

Source: Chart prepared by the authors based on the report [Inequality and social discontent: how to address them from public policy. Economic Report on Central America, Haiti, Mexico, Panama and the Dominican Republic.](#)

The **drop in formal and informal employment** has also been significant. Approximately 70% of the population in the countries of northern Central America works in the informal sector, without an adequate social protection network to deal with the contingencies caused by the pandemic.⁵

In Guatemala, 60,939 jobs were lost, in Panama 284,029 contracts were suspended, and in El Salvador up to 40% of the unemployed population is between 15 and 24 years of age.⁶ Youth unemployment in this country is 13.6%, despite the fact that 12% have higher education, hindering the possibilities of social mobility. Guatemala is one of the countries with the lowest youth unemployment rate in the region at 5.8%.⁷

On the other hand, the health and economic shock caused by the pandemic has aggravated the situation of the different educational sectors, **deteriorating the learning and schooling levels of children and adolescents.** Faced with the fear of contagion and the spread of the virus, schools in the countries analyzed opted to close, offering the alternative of continuing their studies through online systems, highlighting the digital divide between some sectors and departments: only 3.2% of students in El Salvador and 27% of students in Mexico who live in rural areas have devices that allow them to access online platforms. Honduras and Guatemala are the two Central American countries with the lowest average years of schooling. In addition, it is estimated that Panama has suffered a dropout rate of more than 20% and that approximately 2.5 million students in pre-primary, primary and secondary education may have dropped out of school in Mexico.⁸

According to the testimony of a humanitarian organization, Panama is the country in the region where schools have remained closed for the longest period of time, despite the fact that 92% of the teaching staff and 97% of the administrative personnel are vaccinated.⁹ The Inter-American Development Bank estimates that a

million children and young people in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala will not return to school!¹⁰

Criminal violence

In addition to the levels of poverty and inequality, widespread violence through a high number of homicides, femicides and disappearances are elements that can lead to the forced displacement of the population in general, and of children and adolescents in particular, from the countries of northern Central America and Mexico.

Between 2013 and 2020, 128,944 violent incidents were recorded in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Despite the fact that the rate of violent acts per 100,000 inhabitants dropped from 47.8 to 22.5, the levels of violence continue to be sufficiently high for these territories to be abandoned. Young people, regardless of gender, are the most vulnerable to these crimes.¹¹

Likewise, girls and adolescents are in a situation of greater vulnerability to suffer femicides. Girls and adolescents between the ages of 0 and 19 accounted for up to 22% of femicides in Honduras, 14% in El Salvador, 22% in Guatemala³ and 12% in Mexico¹⁴ during 2020.

Finally, children and adolescents are vulnerable to recruitment by gangs due to the absence of solid protection networks, limited educational and employment opportunities, limited state presence in the communities where children and adolescents at risk of recruitment live, and continued cycles of rights violations, social exclusion and poverty. This context can lead to the displacement of this population. Up to 30% of the people deported to the countries of Northern Central America in the 2016-2019 period corresponded to girls, boys and women.¹⁵

Mixed movements of children and adolescents from Northern Central American countries to the United States and Mexico.

The dynamics of human mobility of children and adolescents have experienced different historical moments characterized by the implementation of humanitarian and development policies with different results:

2014 Migrant and refugee children crisis

The increase in detentions of children and adolescents from Northern Central American countries at the southern border of the United States during the Obama administration was the result of a variety of factors: weakening of the rule of law in the countries of Northern Central America, regulatory shortcomings or lack of enforcement in the protection of migrant children, institutional weakness, lack of resources or the existence of other budgetary priorities, failures in the implementation of public policies, arbitrary and/or welfarist practices contrary to a rights-based approach, discrimination, widespread corruption, and high levels of impunity.¹⁶

On the other hand, in July 2014, the Government of Mexico implemented the Southern Border Comprehensive Program, with the purpose of detaining and deporting Central American nationals who were irregularly transiting through its territory. Its implementation was supported by resources from the Merida Initiative provided by the U.S. government.

As a result, from mid-2014 to the first half of 2016 they increased significantly.

the arrests and deportations of people from Central America. There was also a change in the profiles of the mixed movements: at first they were mainly composed of young men, then women, and finally, to a greater extent, boys, girls and adolescents.

Between 2014 and 2016, an estimated 182,791 unaccompanied children and adolescents from northern Central America were apprehended at the southern border of the United States: 16.5% from El Salvador, 18% from Guatemala, 17% from Honduras and 48.4% from Mexico.¹⁷

The humanitarian crisis of 2014 was never effectively addressed, only shifted south. In fiscal year 2015, Mexico repatriated 166,000 Central Americans, 18% of whom were children and adolescents. This increase in the movement of children and adolescents was partially analyzed as an economic issue, ignoring the multi-causality of displacement in Central America. It is worth remembering that, between 2006 and 2016, 150,000 people were murdered in the countries of Northern Central America, an average of more than 50 homicides per day per 100,000 inhabitants.¹⁸

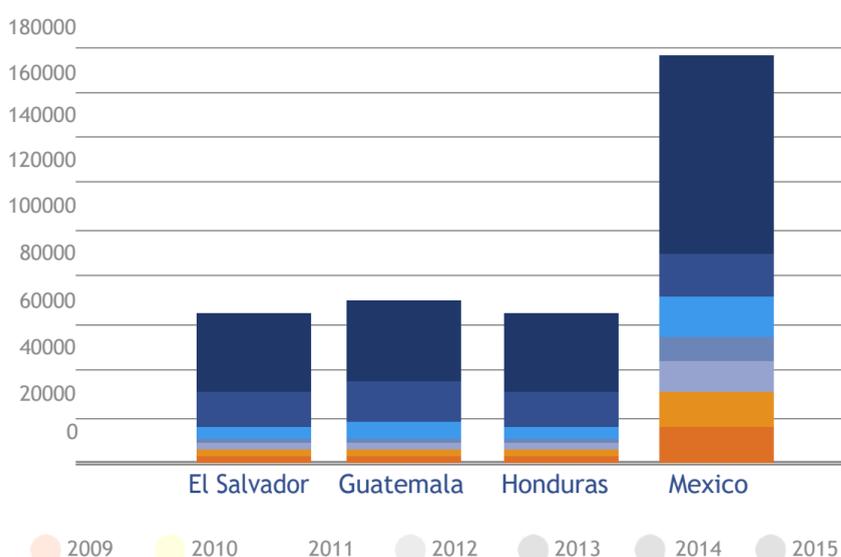
Immigration policies in the Trump administration

From 2018 to January 2021, the governments of Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Donald Trump established a series of agreements that marked a turning point in the region's migration and asylum agenda.

In December 2018, for the first time in its history, Mexico agreed to receive in its territory people with open immigration and asylum proceedings in U.S. courts. This policy, officially known as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), involved the forced return to Mexico's northern border of approximately 70,000 asylum seekers over the course of two years. Mexican territory became a waiting room where foreign nationals eligible for international protection found themselves in a situation where they had to wait to be returned to their country of origin.

forced to settle indefinitely pending the resolution of their immigration or asylum process in the neighboring country. The declaration of the contingency is

Unaccompanied children and adolescents from northern Central America and Mexico apprehended at the southern border of the United States by fiscal year and nationality (2009-2015).



Source: Chart prepared by the authors based on official statistics from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The partial closure of the land border caused their processes to be delayed without an estimated date for their conclusion.

Another substantial change in border management policy was the **militarization of migration control in Mexico** through the deployment of more than 20,000 National Guard members on the northern and southern border in response to threats made by Donald Trump to increase tariffs from 5% to 25% until irregular entries were reduced. Finally, as a consequence of the Covid-19 irruption, the land borders between Mexico and the United States were partially closed on March 20, 2020. In this context, during 2020 the Border Patrol returned more than 380,000 people who crossed its borders into neighboring countries (Mexico and Canada) in an expeditious manner and without verifying their nationality.¹⁹

Current status

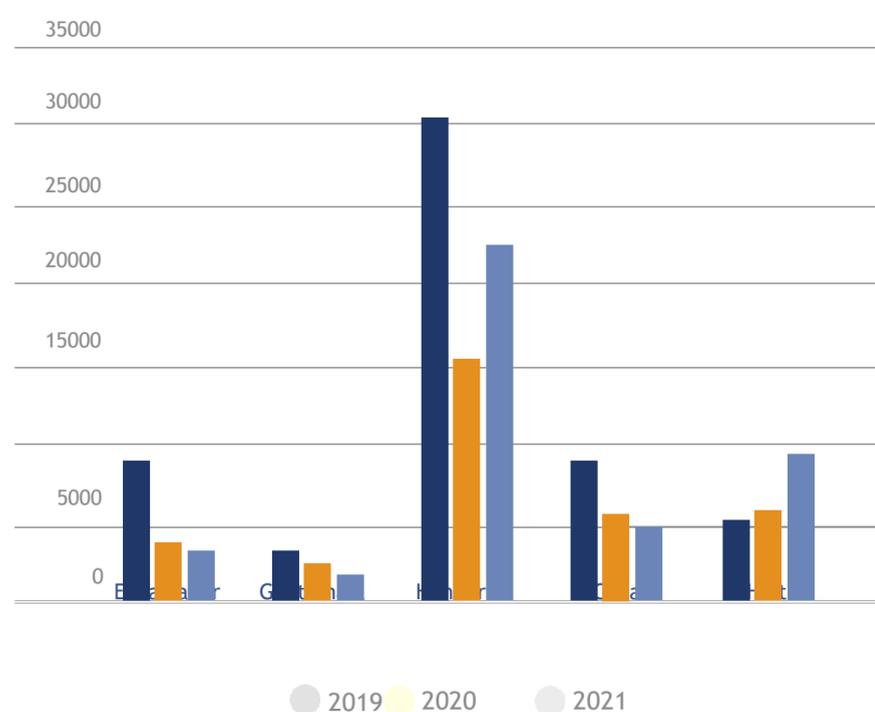
Asylum applications from people from northern Central American countries in the United States and Mexico, as well as the number of detentions at the border between the two countries, have increased exponentially, reaching historic numbers.

These data are not unrelated to the situation of children and adolescents. **The Mexican Commission**

The Refugee Aid Agency reported that during the first half of 2021 it received 11,258 asylum applications from accompanied and unaccompanied minors: 67% of these applications correspond to people from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.²⁰

However, despite these figures, it should be noted that from 2018 to 2020 Cuba and Haiti are two of the 5 nationalities with the highest number of asylum applications filed in Mexico. The number of asylum solicitations filed by procedents from Northern Central American countries in Mexico has gradually decreased since 2019. In relation to asylum applications from people from Northern Central America, only those filed by people originating from Honduras increased in 2021 with respect to 2020.²¹

Asylum seekers in Mexico from Northern Central America, Cuba and Haiti in the period 2019 - 2021.

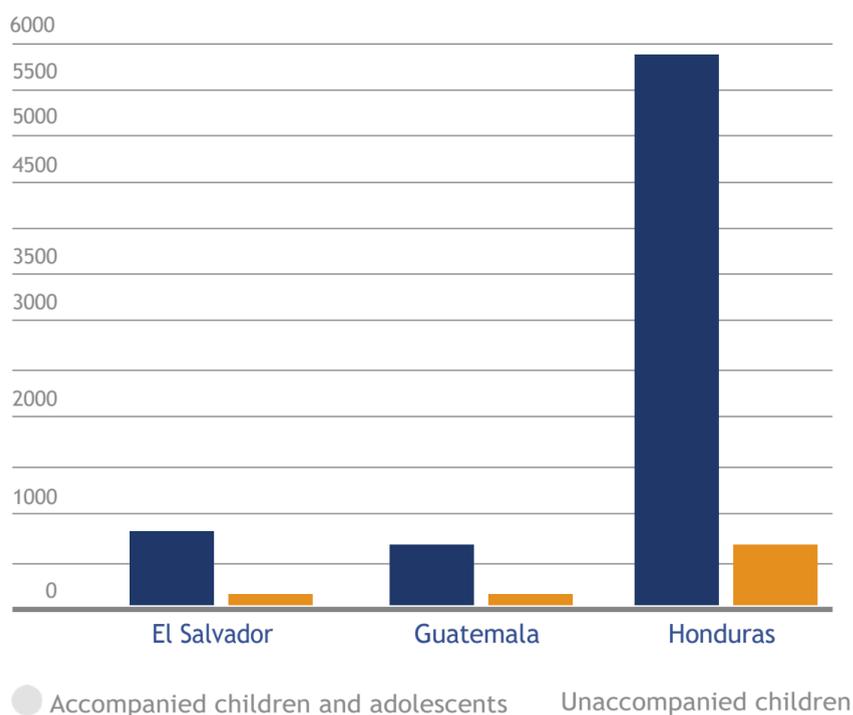


Source: Chart prepared by the authors based on official statistics published by COMAR.

The Title 4222 policy initiated under the previous U.S. administration continues under the Biden administration, with one important difference: currently, unaccompanied children and adolescents are not automatically expelled when crossing the border, although children and adolescents who arrive in the United States in family units are quickly deported.²³

Although the impact of the pandemic caused a decrease in the number of refugees and migrants transiting through Mexico, from January 1 to June 6, the National Migration Institute (INM) found 17,750 children and adolescents from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Likewise, in a single day at the end of May, almost a thousand migrants and people in need of international protection were deported to northern Central America. One of the most worrisome aspects in terms of human rights is the failure to guarantee the right to seek and receive asylum for people fleeing for reasons related to violence and/or persecution. In many cases, when minors are returned to the countries of northern Central America, there is a violation of the principle of non-refoulement, exposing people in need of international protection to situations where they may be in need of international protection.

Applications for refugee status in Mexico in the first half of 2021 from accompanied and unaccompanied children and adolescents from Northern Central American countries.



Source: Chart prepared by the authors based on official statistics published by COMAR.

where their life and/or liberty may be at risk. In 2020 alone, despite the decrease in the number of admissions due to border closures during the pandemic, the INM continued to deport more than 70% of unaccompanied children and adolescents.

It is essential to create the appropriate conditions for these children on the move to be able to exercise their right to seek asylum in Mexico, to guarantee the appropriate protection measures in accordance with the best interests of the child, including the possibility of family reunification with relatives in the United States, and to establish coordination mechanisms with U.S. authorities to allow for the safe and orderly entry of these children into the United States, including the possibility of family reunification with relatives in the United States and the establishment of coordination mechanisms with U.S. authorities to allow the safe and orderly entry of these children into the United States, given that it is estimated that more than 80% of unaccompanied children and adolescents from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala in transit through Mexico seek to be reunited with family members residing in the United States. In 40% of cases, they have a father, mother or legal guardian waiting for them in the United States.²⁴

Legal framework

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and its monitoring body, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, are two of the main international instruments for the protection of children, regardless of whether they are in a situation of human mobility or not. Specifically, Article 22 establishes that States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures receives, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or any other person, appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of his or her rights. It further provides that States shall cooperate in all efforts to protect and assist any refugee child in locating his or her parents or other family members, and to provide protection in cases where no parents or family members can be located.

In the American context, it is important to mention the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, especially the standards established in Advisory Opinion n. 21/14 on Rights and Guarantees of children in the context of migration and/or in need of international protection. The main standards established are:

Unrestricted respect for the human rights of children and adolescents regardless of their legal status;

Respect for due process and best interests in immigration and asylum procedures involving children and adolescents;

Prioritization by the States of the human rights approach from a cross-cutting perspective that includes the rights of children and adolescents and, in particular, their protection and comprehensive development when designing, adopting and implementing migration and asylum policies.

Recognition of the subjective right of all persons, including children and adolescents, to seek and receive asylum, and States should allow children and adolescents to present asylum requests in their own capacity, and that their requests be analyzed in an adequate and individualized manner with due process guarantees;

Responsibility of States to identify children and adolescents in need of international protection and obligation to establish the respective procedures to ensure this identification;

Prohibition of the return of children and adolescents to a country or territory where their life, liberty, safety or integrity may be at risk, or to a third country from which they may subsequently be returned to a country or territory where they may be at risk;

Illegitimacy of the deprivation of liberty of children and adolescents due to migration issues, and adoption of alternative measures to detention;

Obligation of States to ensure that refugee and migrant children and adolescents involved in migration or asylum processes have access to legal assistance through free state legal representation services;

Shared responsibility among countries of origin, transit and destination in guaranteeing the comprehensive protection of migrant and refugee children and adolescents;

Protection of the family unit in migration and asylum procedures;

Obligation of States not to adopt practices or legislation regarding the granting of nationality whose application favors the increase in the number of stateless persons and to grant their nationality to a person born in their territory - regardless of his or her migratory status - who would otherwise remain stateless.

Protection risks and humanitarian response along the migratory route

Children and adolescents are one of the most vulnerable groups to suffer risks in the context of mixed movements to the United States and Mexico. The absence or weakness of national mechanisms for the protection of children and adolescents can also hinder their return and reintegration to their country of origin. 53,564 people have been returned in the first half of 2021: 53% from Honduras, 44% from Guatemala and 4% from El Salvador. Of the returnees in this period, 11% were minors. ²⁵

According to an analysis by the Center for Global Development, from 2011 through 2016, each additional homicide in northern Central American countries resulted in approximately four additional arrests of unaccompanied children at the U.S.-Mexico border. These data appear to indicate a correlation between the displacement of unaccompanied minors and increased levels of violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

It should be noted that **vulnerability to protection risks is differentiated according to, among other variables, gender, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability and ethnicity, among others.** During their journey through Mexico, **children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, victimization and recruitment by organized crime, and girls are at greater risk of suffering sexual violence and being victims of trafficking during their journey.** Children and adolescents are also more vulnerable due to their lack of resources and their inability to defend themselves. ²⁶

On the other hand, from January to September 2021, 50 bodies have been located on the Darien border and recently a boat in Colombia carrying 30 people to Panama was shipwrecked and three people died and six others are still missing, including three minors. These data show the risks and violence to which the people who make up the mixed movements in the region are exposed.

In a joint statement by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Women, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) stressed **"the need to reinforce safe, regular and orderly migration routes to reduce the number of people living in poverty, regular and orderly channels of movement to reduce the risk of loss of life and urge the strengthening of investigations against national and transnational organized networks involved in trafficking, smuggling and related illicit activities.** They also urge States "to protect the rights to seek and receive asylum of all persons in mobility, particularly families, women, children and others in particular need of protection," and urge them to "ensure effective access to basic services, regardless of the reasons why these persons left their country of origin, their migration status, their level of income and the circumstances or conditions of their journey. In this regard, inter-institutional work between the authorities of transit countries is essential to **"design and implement a comprehensive and effective regional response to ensure dignified and safe mobility.** ²⁷



EL SALVADOR

EL SALVADOR

Triggering factors of the flow of children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility.

The country's total population is estimated at 6,642,767 people: 61.7% reside in urban areas and 38.3% in rural areas. **Approximately 2 million are children and adolescents, that is, 3 out of every 10 persons are under 18 years of age. Up to 47.3% of this population represents early childhood (under 9 years of age).** El Salvador's Human Development Index in 2019 was 0.673, ranking the country in the medium human development category and 124th out of 189 countries and territories. The index value drops to 0.529 when adjusted for the level of inequality, that is, it loses 21.4% due to inequality in income distribution. In addition, the Gender Inequality Index in 2019 was 0.383, ranking the country 85th out of 162 countries.

Thirty-one percent of parliamentary seats are held by women. 39.9% of adult women have attained at least one year of secondary education, compared to 46.4% of adult men. In addition --another relevant data, shown in more recent surveys referring to 2014-- according to the Multidimensional Poverty Index estimate, 7.9% of the population (505,000 people) live in multidimensional poverty and another 9.9% are classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty (635,000 people).²⁸

According to the most recent data allowing for the analysis of the right to education of children and adolescents dated 2018, access to education seems to deteriorate during the life cycle: the enrollment rate in that year gradually declines from primary education (82%), third cycle (57.3%) to high school (37.6%). The dropout rate in 2018 was 6.1% for middle education and 4.3% for basic education. It should be emphasized that The country's dropout was another of the main motives wielded. Both elements offer a perspective of the incidence of generalized violence and its intercession in guaranteeing the right to a dignified life and education in Salvadoran NNAs.²⁹

The impact of violence, high levels of inequality, lack of opportunities and the impact of climate change are the main factors that can initiate a situation of human mobility. The latest available data indicate that between 2006 and 2016, 71,500 internally displaced persons were registered.³⁰

Among the main actors that may result in the internal displacement of Salvadoran children and adolescents are gang groups, public security authorities, extermination groups and members of family groups. The exposure and vulnerability to suffer certain violent acts such as threats, extortion and homicides can affect a single family member, adult or minor, or an entire family group and trigger forced internal displacement. This violence is exercised differently depending on gender: boys, adolescents and young men may be coerced to join gangs; girls, adolescents and young women are sexually harassed to become "partners" of gang members.³¹

"The proliferation and strength of gangs has treated children and adolescents as things and possessions. This also transcends domestic violence. Violence forces children and adolescents to flee: seven out of ten children and adolescents suffer direct violence. Sexual abuse of girls and adolescents in El Salvador is very frequent both inside and outside the home. El Salvador has also had the world's highest rates of femicides."

Humanitarian organization based in El Salvador

In the last five years, 16,327 children under the age of 18 died violent deaths. Although the homicide rate has decreased during this period, more than 50% continues to register one of the highest rates of homicides against children in the world. Of particular concern is the relative weight of violent deaths of girls, which ranged from 15.2% in 2019 to 32.3% in 2020.³²

Forced disappearance is another phenomenon that affects children and adolescents, especially girls. Between 2010 and 2020, the Attorney General's Office received more than 12,000 reports of missing women: 42% of these reports corresponded to girls between 13 and 17 years of age. Another of the crimes to which girls are most exposed is **gender-based violence**. Of the victims of sexual crimes registered last year, 48.5% were girls between the ages of 13 and 17.

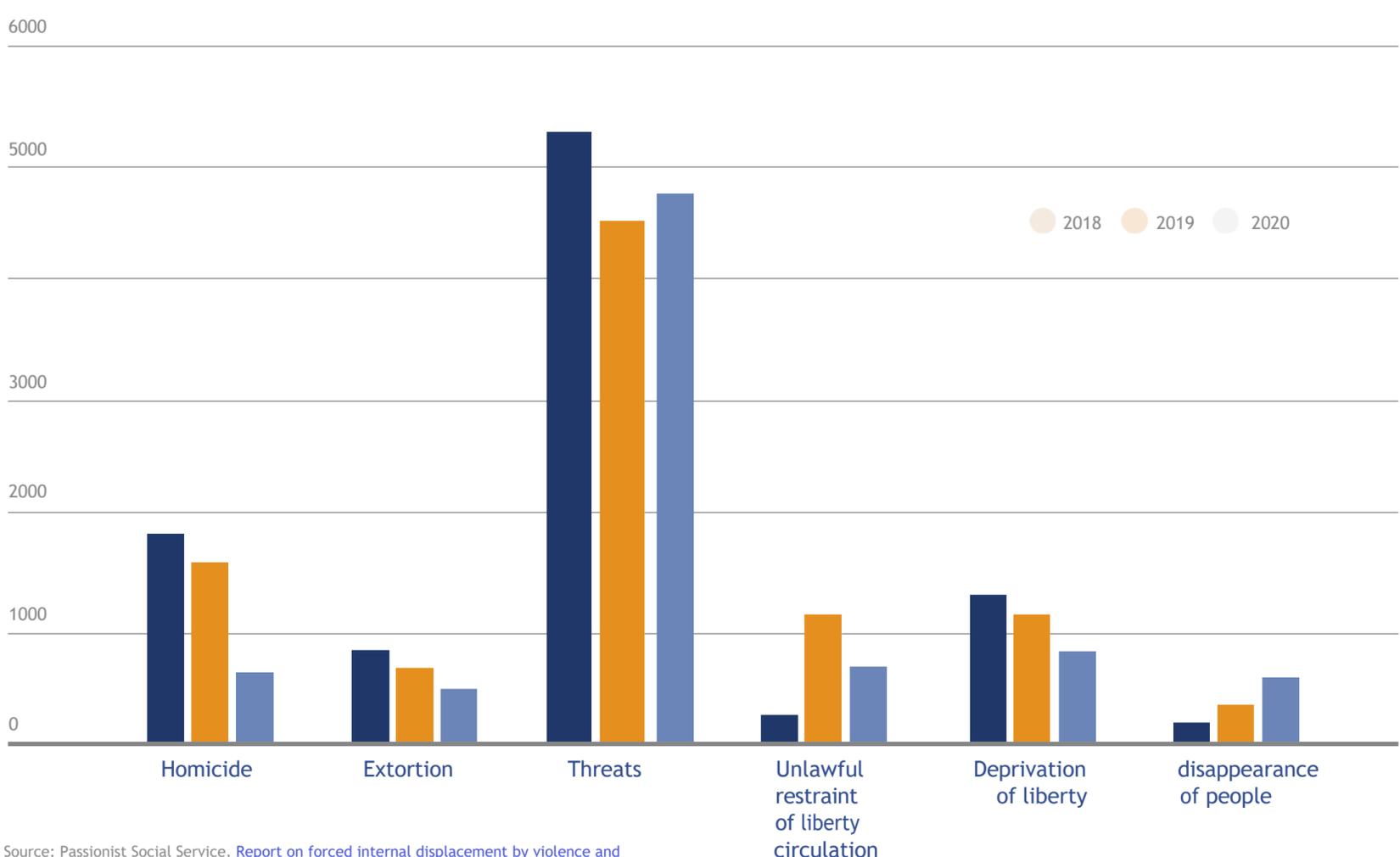
were girls and adolescents under the age of 18.³³ Being a woman, young and poor in El Salvador undoubtedly represents a triple vulnerability.

According to the testimony of a humanitarian organization, the victimization of girls by femicides violates their physical and moral integrity. When this situation is added to the precarious context of poverty, it is understandable that people leave the country. On the other hand, the migration or forced displacement of fathers, mothers or caregivers to the United States means that children and adolescents are left alone in their places of origin, exposing them to various protection risks such as extortion, forced or coerced recruitment, among others. It also makes them vulnerable to intra-family violence, as they may be under the responsibility of other people close to the family or friends.³⁴

The following graph shows the correlation between the prevalence of different crimes and their impact in triggering a displacement cycle:



Trend in crimes related to forced internal displacement by violence during 2018, 2019, 2020 (M=January to June).



Social risks and multidimensional vulnerability of children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility.

Children and adolescents suffer systematic human rights violations that result in a constant cycle of displacement and deportation. This situation is even more complex due to the scarce social investment and the weakness of the State's protection institutions to comply with international commitments regarding the protection of children.³⁵

In the course of 2020, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace, El Salvador became the fifteenth country with the greatest economic impact of violence out of the 163 countries analyzed, affecting 18% of GDP.³⁶ These economic costs are associated with social losses such as the breakdown of the social fabric, interpersonal distrust and the deterioration of public spaces. In this sense, the rights to education, recreation, health and food are undermined.³⁷

The following is a brief description of some of the social risks faced by this population profile in their country of origin:

Teenage pregnancy

Between 2015 and 2020, 111,036 pregnancies were registered in girls and adolescents, 503 of these corresponded to children under 14 years of age. In addition, last year 16 of them died of maternal mortality and there is a high percentage of infants who are at high risk of low birth weight, which makes their physical and cognitive development process more complex due to the vulnerability to present malnutrition problems.

It should be noted that, according to article 159 of the Penal Code, adolescent pregnancy refers to sexual intercourse with children under fifteen years of age as rape, and shall be punishable by imprisonment for fourteen to twenty years³⁸. It is also pertinent to remember that the interruption of pregnancy is not permitted under any grounds³⁹ and that premature and teenage pregnancy increases the tendency to perpetuate the cycle of poverty, since it contributes to the increase in school dropout rates, child labor and unemployment. Therefore, it generates a series of negative consequences on the wellbeing and integral development of girls and adolescents.⁴⁰

Child labor

Although there is no updated data on this phenomenon in 2020, the latest available figures indicate that it is a current social risk. According to data from the Ministry of Economy, General Directorate of Econo-

mic Affairs, Directorate General for Economic Development, Directorate General for Economic Development 93,283 boys (72%) and girls (28%) were in child labor in 2019. These figures should be rigorously analyzed. Although it would appear that boys face a greater risk of falling into child labor than girls, it should be noted that it may underestimate the greater tendency of girls to engage in less visible forms of child labor, such as domestic work in the homes of others or care work for younger siblings.⁴¹

Trata

Between 2016 and June 2020, 293 cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation were registered. This crime has a special incidence on girls and adolescents. Considering the consolidated data for 2019, 7 out of 10 female victims were under 19 years of age.⁴²

Deportation of Salvadoran children and adolescents

13,345 Salvadoran children and adolescents have been deported from 2017 to July 2021. Their relative weight with respect to the total returnee population has varied in recent years. Although the number of men and adult women who move is greater, it is worth noting the increase in this profile in recent years. From 2017 to this year, the number of returned children has tripled. They currently represent up to 30% of the total population that is deported to the country.

Despite the existence of an artificial protection route before, during and after return, some humanitarian organizations have pointed out some shortcomings in the actual functioning of this care circuit.

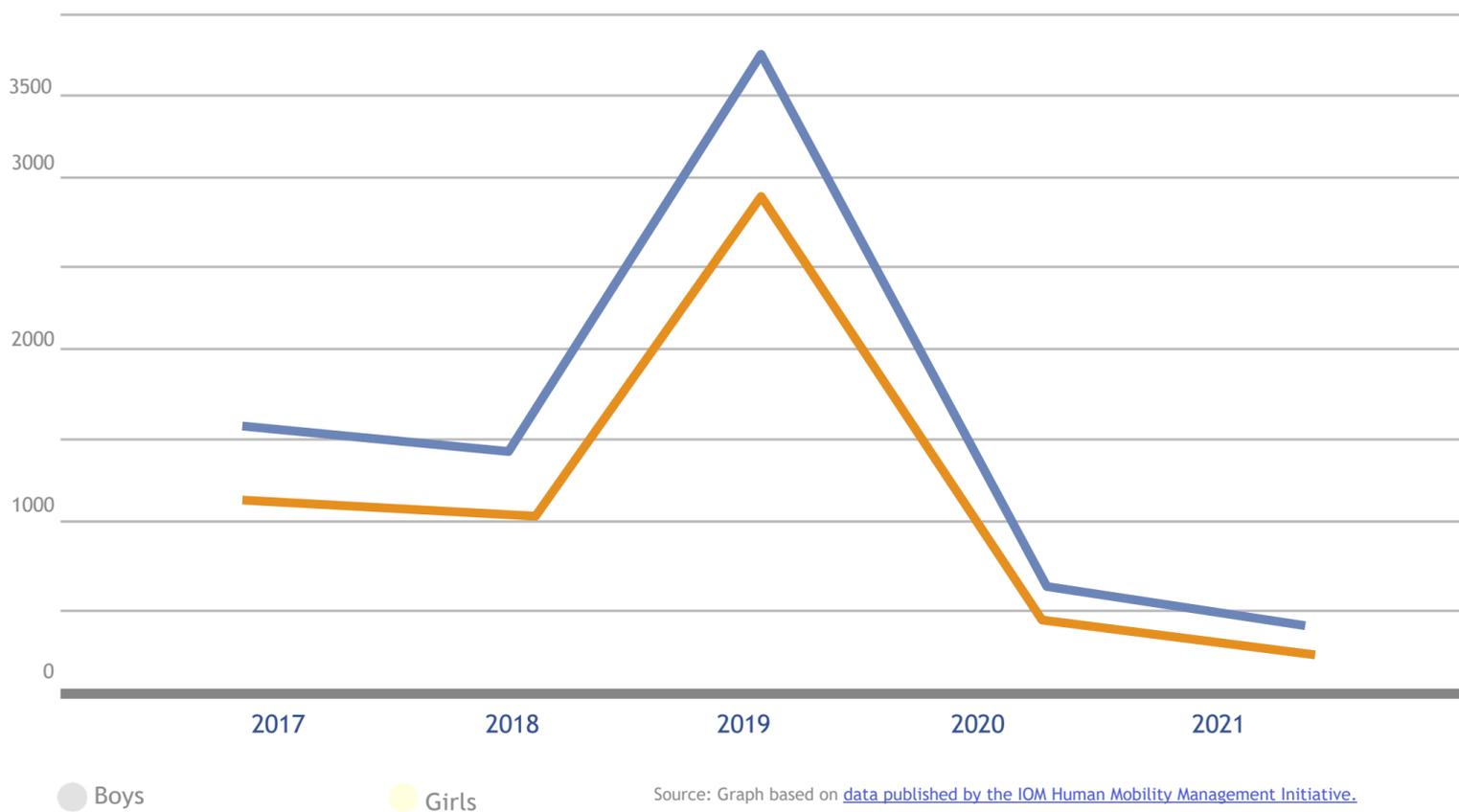
When a child is repatriated by land or air, the General Directorate of Migration and Alien Affairs conducts an interview and medical consultation and, if deemed appropriate, a referral for psychological consultation. The Protection Boards are responsible for handing the child over to a family member, who is interviewed. If a need for legal assistance is detected, the child is referred to the Procuraduría General de la República (PGR).

In a second stage, the administrative procedure for protection and restitution of rights is initiated, whereby a psychological evaluation and socio-family investigation are ordered. If a protective measure is ordered, the status of minors is determined, taking their opinion into account in any decision taken.

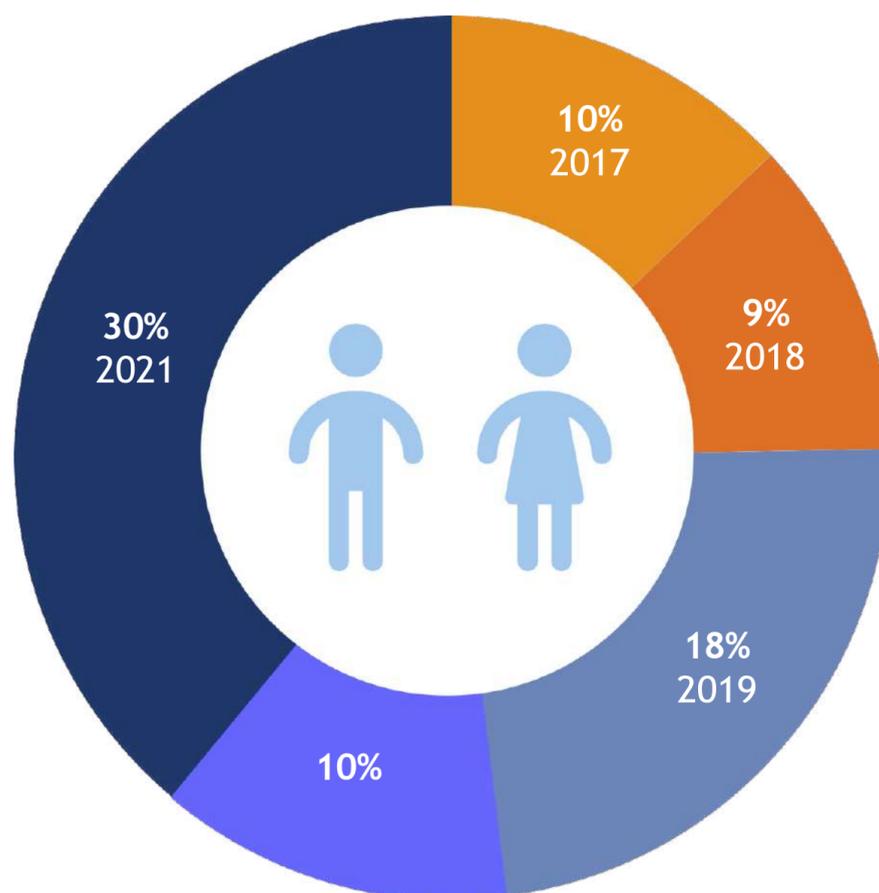
by the Boards of Protection. Afterwards, a single hearing is held with the child and his or her family and, if the case is not resolved in the instance of the Protection Boards, it is referred to the Specialized Court for Children and Adolescents and the protection measures issued are followed up.

However, some humanitarian organizations have pointed out that the processes of family and community reintegration are not adequately followed up, especially with regard to educational reintegration.⁴³

Trend in crimes related to forced internal displacement by violence during 2018, 2019, 2020 (M=January to June).



Percentage of children deported compared to the percentage of deported children to total population deported from 2017 to July 2021



Legal and social mechanisms for the protection of children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility.

The country does not have a comprehensive protection system for children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility. The current system operates irregularly. In January 2020, the so-called "Special Law for the Protection and Development of Salvadoran Migrants and their Families" was created for the protection of this population profile. However, its operation has received some criticism.

"This law did not seek to integrate families with children, men and women, but to prevent families from sharing the State portfolios that have the obligation to protect. Despite the establishment of shelters, they do not guarantee the safety of children and adolescents. It has not yet entered into force because it lacks a regulation and a program".

Humanitarian organization based in El Salvador

Children need to be understood and addressed as part of a social system integrated by institutions such as the family, the State, the school and the community. However, children and adolescents are not consulted by the actors who are concerned about migrating or moving, neither in the family group, nor by the protection system itself.

One of the main criticisms that persists, according to the interviews conducted, is that the State does not offer the necessary protection conditions when returning to the places of origin. It is then very common for them to re-experience the protection risks that generated their displacement, such as exposure to violence and other reasons why children and adolescents were forced to flee.

Children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility are not a homogeneous group. It is essential to take into consideration not only age and gender, but also their ethnicity, family organization, as well as the adult responsibilities they have assumed. This characterization is indispensable for institutions to guarantee comprehensive protection and better reintegration and reparation options; which is not very clear in some of the existing legal and social frameworks. For example, the Law on Migration and Foreigners and the Law on Trafficking in Persons do not incorporate a differentiated treatment between children and adolescents.⁴⁴

For this reason, the organizations interviewed insist that this population profile must be analyzed taking into account their heterogeneity and the diversity of conditions of vulnerability they face during their displacement cycle.⁴⁵

The following is a brief description of the regulatory framework governing the protection of children and adolescents:

Laws for the protection of children and adolescents in El Salvador	
Law	Function
Political Constitution of the Republic	Article 2 guarantees the right of every person, including children and adolescents, to life, physical and moral integrity, liberty, security and property. This gives priority protection to the right to life and to objective means of livelihood to ensure integral development and a quality existence.
Law for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents (LEPINA)	It entered into force on April 16, 2010. This law provides a binding conceptual framework for the implementation of actions and strategies to ensure full compliance with the rights of children and adolescents in El Salvador.
General Migration Law (Decree 2772 of 1958)	References to child and adolescent migrants in El Salvador are indirect ⁴⁶
Special Law for the Protection and Development of the Salvadoran Migrant and his or her Family (Decree 655).	Special protection for groups in vulnerable conditions, including children and adolescents (paragraph d); and the best interest of the child ⁴⁷ .
Draft special law on migration and foreigners	1. procedure for family reunification; 2. regularization of their migratory situation; 3. procedure for the recognition of refugee status; 4. repatriation or assisted return; and, 5. others established in this Law (Article 277) ⁴⁸ .

Responses from civil society organizations and international organizations

The programs and projects implemented by the different humanitarian organizations to promote the social reintegration of children and adolescents cannot be unrelated to the reasons that triggered a cycle of displacement.

In this sense, since violence is one of the factors that motivates children to leave the country, its incidence continues to be present when they return. Children and adolescents may return timid for fear of the event that triggered their displacement, have difficulty adapting to the changes and are afraid of integrating into new spaces such as school.

The situations of violence that they suffered during their transit to the United States or Mexico also confluence as challenges in their reintegration. They often suffer sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, direct physical violence, mistreatment by migration authorities and are also susceptible to becoming victims of trafficking and smuggling networks.⁴⁹

Educational reintegration is another challenge for the reintegration of deported and displaced children. Often, they lose years of schooling that are difficult to make up later on and which puts them in a situation of extra-age for the grade they should be in.

In this sense, there is a growing demand to provide mental health services and psychosocial support to this population profile, in addition to the implementation of flexible education models adapted to these profiles and sensitive to the situation of violence in the territory.

According to the testimony of one humanitarian organization, while some efforts have been made to strengthen repatriation centers and the institutions' protective process, the challenge is what happens when they return to the same community from which they were expelled.

The Ministry of Education has flexible modalities that could be adapted to the conditions of returned children and adolescents. However, the lack of accompaniment in the dynamics of adaptation and the lack of knowledge on the part of those in charge of children and adolescents about these modalities makes their implementation difficult. "For this reason, it would be advisable to review the modalities so that children can participate in them. How they adapt to these particular circumstances in the territory and not only that the child has to adapt to the modalities. I think it is a two-level intervention: the children pre-set for these modalities and the modalities adapted to the circumstances of the children."⁵⁰

The state mechanisms responsible for the care and protection of children and adolescents are the National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONNA) and the Salvadoran Institute for the Integral Development of Children and Adolescents (ISNA), as well as the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women (ISDEMU). However, the division of functions is made according to the roles of each institution in the legal and humanitarian sphere, as shown in the following table:

Population	Institution	Humanitarian				Legal		Durable solutions
		Population, shelter	Economic	Psychological	Physician	Legal Counsel	Complaints	
General	PDDH			x		x	x	
	PGR			x		x	x	
	Prosecutor's Office						x	
	PNC	x					x	
	Hospital	x		x	x			
Specific groups	DNAVMF	x	x	x		x		x
	ISNA	x	x	x	x	x		x
	ISDEMU	x	x	x		x		

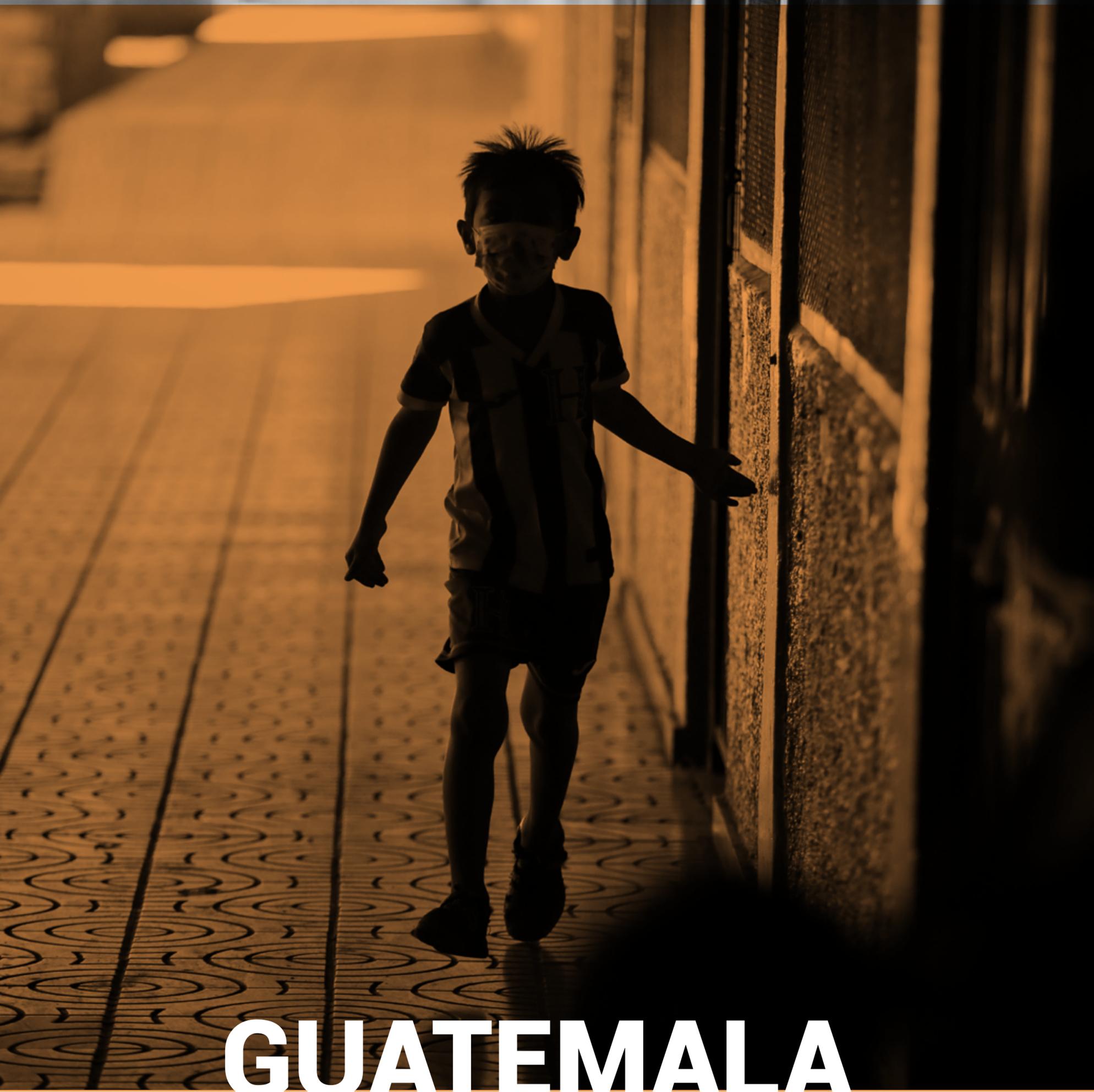
However, efforts have been articulated by civil society organizations, such as the project "Good practices for the protection of migrant and displaced children", an initiative carried out in April 2021 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the European Union. The objective of the project is to strengthen protection mechanisms for children and adolescents in conditions of human mobility. One of the instruments to achieve greater efficiency is support through school subsidies, workshops, employment and support for children and adolescents in conditions of human mobility.

psycho-social self-help. Among the partner organizations involved in the project are the Salvadoran Institute for the Integral Development of Children and Adolescents (ISNA), the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDDH), the Independent Monitoring Group of El Salvador (GMIES), CONTEXTOS, Scalabrinian Missionaries, the Spanish/Salvadorian Red Cross, SOS Children's Villages, Save the Children and the Human Rights Institute of the UCA (IDHUCA). One of the expected results of the project is the construction of institutional capacities to address in a more comprehensive and effective manner the conditions of vulnerability that cause children and adolescents to be forcibly displaced.⁵¹

Policies and programs related to children and adolescents in conditions of human mobility.

Policies and programs for the protection of children and adolescents	
Policy or program	Function
National Policy for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents (PNPNA)	Its purpose is to guide the actions and coordination of all members of the National Comprehensive Protection System (Cfr. articles 103 and 109 of the LEPINA). Its guidelines are binding for decisions and actions aimed at guaranteeing the rights of children and adolescents (2013, 3) and are valid from 2013 to 2023.
Comprehensive care plan for children and adolescents returned with protection measures in their family environment, from a human rights and gender perspective.	It was prepared by the Sub-Directorate of Rights Protection Programs of the Salvadoran Institute for the Comprehensive Development of Children and Adolescents (ISNA) with the collaboration of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to meet the country's commitments assumed in its legislation and in international instruments for the protection of Human Rights, in particular, the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Approved in January 2016, it seeks to contribute to the fulfillment of the rights and satisfaction of the immediate needs of deported children and adolescents.
Vocational Training Program for Young Returnees	Developed by the U.S. <i>Committee for Refugees and Migrants</i> (USCRI), it aims to provide job training opportunities to young Salvadoran women and men who have been deported and are seeking to improve their economic conditions.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the: Educational Trends in Latin America Information System, [PNPNA 2013-2013](#). OCHA, [Plan de atención integral a niños, niñas y adolescentes retornados con medidas de protección en su entorno familiar](#), 2016. Instituto Salvadoreño de Formación Profesional, [Programa de Formación Profesional para Jóvenes Retornados](#), 2021.



GUATEMALA

GUATEMALA

Triggering factors of the flow of children and adolescents in a mobility situation to the United States and Mexico

59.3% of the population in Guatemala is in a situation of general poverty and 24.4% in extreme poverty. In addition, the level of inequality according to the Gini coefficient is 0.530.⁵²

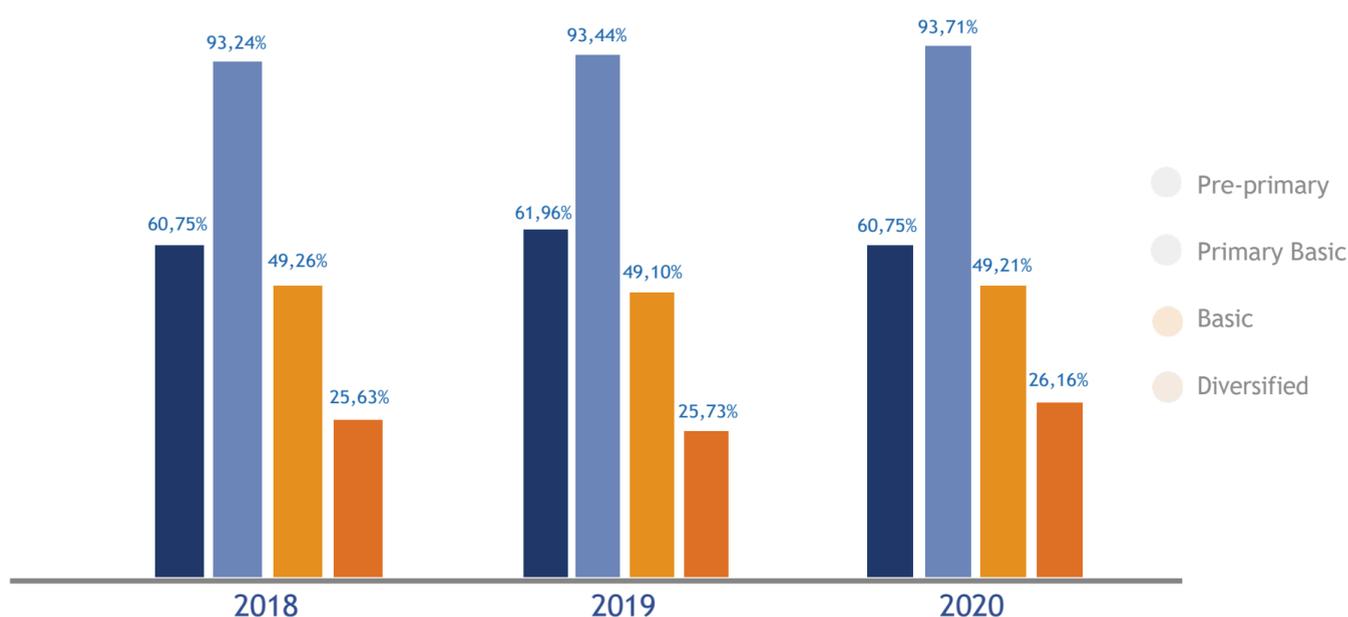
Public investment for children and adolescents, who represent 40.3% of Guatemalans, represented 3.7% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020. The levels of inequality are worrisome and the instruments designed for children are insufficient, leaving the majority of children and adolescents in a vulnerable situation.⁵³

Despite the fact that most economic resources are allocated to education, educational coverage is insufficient in the country. The level with the highest coverage in the last three years is primary education, that is, education for children between the ages of 7 and 12. However, this

The number of schools in the basic and diversified levels, oriented to adolescents between 13 and 18 years of age, decreases considerably. In addition, of the 49,337 educational centers in the country, 69% belong to the official or public sector and 28% to the private sector.

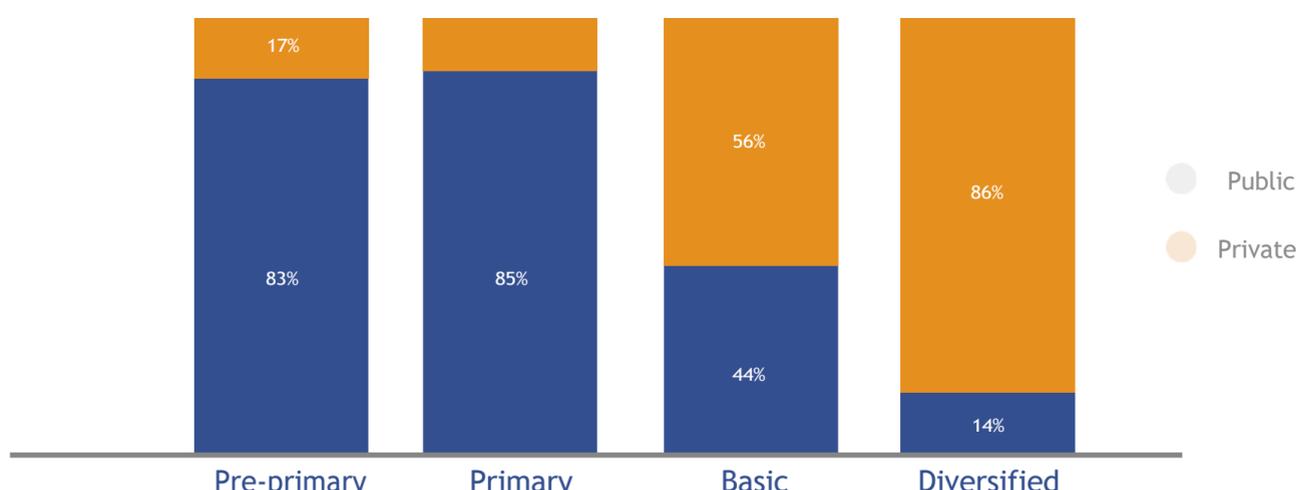
It can be seen that as children advance through the educational levels, the options for accessing public education are reduced, mainly because it is concentrated at the primary level. On the other hand, 61% of the educational establishments that serve the basic and diversified levels belong to the private sector. It can be inferred that in most cases only adolescents whose families have the economic resources to pay for private education can continue in the educational system.⁵⁴

Net schooling rate or coverage, 2018-2020.



Source: Based on Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Education.

Net schooling rate or coverage, 2018-2020.



Source: Based on Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Education.

The results of the 2018 Population Census allow us to measure this gap, since it was identified that only 21.3% of Guatemalan households had a computer and 17.3% had access to internet service⁵⁵. This situation contrasts with the 2019 cifra of children and adolescents outside the school system, where approximately 1.5 million children and adolescents were identified as not attending school.⁵⁶

On the other hand, **chronic malnutrition** is also a phenomenon related to the lack of guarantee of rights for children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility and in general for children in the country. Malnutrition, in its different levels, affects 46.5% of children under 5 years of age in the country. This incidence is aggravated by ethnic group: 61.2% of indigenous children are chronically malnourished, which is almost double the figure for the Mesoamerican population, 34.5%.⁵⁷ It is important to mention that 2.7% of the population in Guatemala was severely food insecure prior to the Co-VID-19 pandemic; as a result of containment measures, the percentage rose to 7.4% (1.3 million people) during 2020.⁵⁸

Violence: another trigger for migration and displacement

There are multiple expressions of violence that affect children and adolescents, both in the private and public spheres. This section breaks down some data prepared by the National Institute of Forensic Sciences (INACIF) between 2019 and May 2021:

6 out of 10 medical evaluations for injuries consistent with maltreatment were performed on girls and adolescents under 19 years of age (n=3,040).

The trends in the evaluations show that girls are more likely to suffer maltreatment at the onset of adolescence. The opposite is true for boys. Maltreatment shows a decrease at the beginning of adolescence.⁵⁹

9 out of 10 medical examinations for sexual offenses in children under 19 years of age are performed on girls and adolescents (n=13,456).

From the age of 10, girls are in a special situation of vulnerability to sexual violence.⁶⁰ It is important to note that Guatemalan legislation states that all pregnancies in girls under 14 years of age represent sexual violence.

xual.⁶¹ The Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance reported 4,880 pregnancies in girls under 14 years of age from 2019 to May 2021.⁶²

In 8 out of 10 homicides of children under 19 years of age, the victims were children and adolescents (n=1,882).

Fifty-three percent of the homicides were homicides with firearms. At the beginning of adolescence, minors are in a situation of special vulnerability since this is the stage when the highest number of homicides are reported.⁶³

Children displaced after extreme weather events

It is important to highlight that extreme weather events are added to the list of multiple reasons for migration and displacement affecting children and adolescents.

The Eta and Iota storms displaced approximately 185,000 people internally during 2020.⁶⁴ It is worth noting the differentiated impact on children and adolescents. According to a survey conducted by the IOM in two of the country's departments, 5 out of every 10 people affected in the households belong to this population. Thirty-six percent of households were still in a situation of displacement in March 2021 and in 1 out of every 10 households some member of the cohabitation group intended to migrate in the next 12 months.⁶⁵

The situations of vulnerability that can lead to forced displacement are multiple and interconnected. They include the impact of climate change on health, crop failures that jeopardize food security and increase malnutrition, as well as difficulties in guaranteeing the right to education. Access to school has been adversely affected as a result of tropical storms.⁶⁶

Social risks and multidimensional vulnerability of children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility.

"In our community it is impossible to realize our dream. That's why we have to flee."

Testimony of a displaced person

The levels of vulnerability of children and adolescents vary according to their sociodemographic characteristics. Conditions of poverty and extreme poverty, the multiple expressions of violence, the absence of social policies and family reunification represent structural factors common to the vast majority of this population. 67

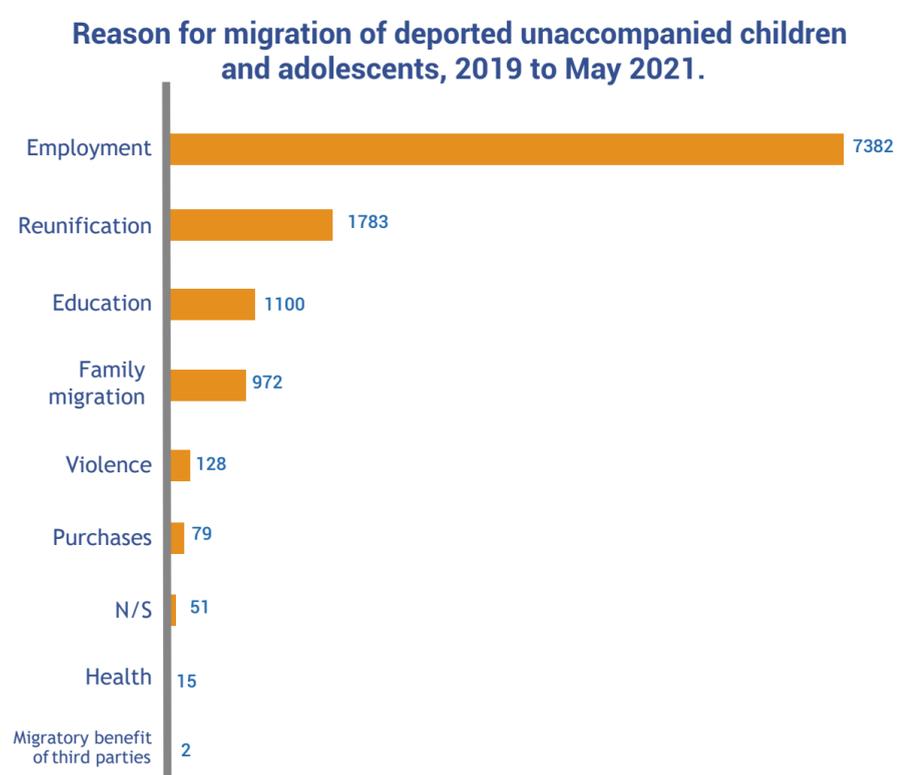
Guatemala as country of origin

Given the situations of lack of protection that children and adolescents suffer, human traffickers or coyotes reinforce the idea of using children as an entry pass to the United States, rooting in the imagination of the people the possibility of obtaining protection as a refugee through the analysis of the child's case. It is common for children 4 or 5 years old to travel with one of their fathers, mothers, older siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles, and in extreme cases with neighbors.

To persuade the children, the families use discourses such as "you'd better go, take advantage of the fact that you are a minor, they will give you papers" or they themselves have internalized the idea that "because I am a child I have the possibility of passing". 68 On the other hand, boys and girls are forced to work from an early age to help support the household, and in the absence of job opportunities in their communities of origin, they see migration as the only option. 69 In fact, 64% of unaccompanied children and adolescents who were deported from Mexico and the United States from 2019 to May 2021, referred to the search for employment as the main motivation for migrating. 70 However, humanitarian organizations have identified that the reasons for displacement and migration are multi-causal, and economic needs are often accompanied by some risk to their safety.

Likewise, situations of violence are also triggers of migration and displacement for children and adolescents, either directly or indirectly. In many cases, domestic violence forces mothers to flee with their children, or adolescents flee because of violence against them by their own families due to their sexual orientation; 71 there are girls who flee from forced early marital unions. 72

Pregnancy can be another trigger for migration and displacement; many girls flee from domestic violence due to rejection because of pregnancy, sexual violence and violence by the police. 73 During 2020, 20 cases of girls and adolescents with their babies or pregnant women who were deported were recorded; 74 there are also cases of male adolescents who are forced to migrate to obtain economic resources due to adolescent parenthood. 75



Source: SBS, Public Information, Resolution: UIP 259-2021, June 2021.

It should be emphasized that the triggers for migration and displacement overlap one another, and behind the stated reason for migrating or leaving coexist situations of lack of protection, including family reunification and the intention to seek employment and support the family economy or to flee from violence by caregivers or criminal groups in the country. 76

Guatemala as a transit country:

On the migratory route through Guatemala, families are exposed to risks such as extortion, which, in many cases, is practiced by migratory authorities, who threaten migrants and refugees with taking away their children in exchange for payment of a fee. 77 In addition, there are risks associated with the presence of organized crime and trafficking networks along the route. 78 Furthermore, when entering through "blind spots" there is a risk of being the victim of theft of documents, belongings, money, telephone and in many cases children and adolescents are exposed to hunger and

On the other hand, it should be noted that the country has also been making progress in the implementation of care mechanisms for this population. Casa Nuestras Raíces: transit shelter for children and adolescents in mobility contexts of the Social Welfare Secretariat (SBS).

When an unaccompanied or separated child is identified, the Attorney General's Office is immediately notified and the child is transferred to the Casa Nuestras Raíces shelters in order to their shelter. At the shelter they receive psychosocial care, information and an assessment to identify vulnerabilities. 80

From 2019 to May 2021 the following were attended 353 unaccompanied or separated children and adolescents in the shelters: 73% were male, 26% female and less than 1% LGBTIQ+.

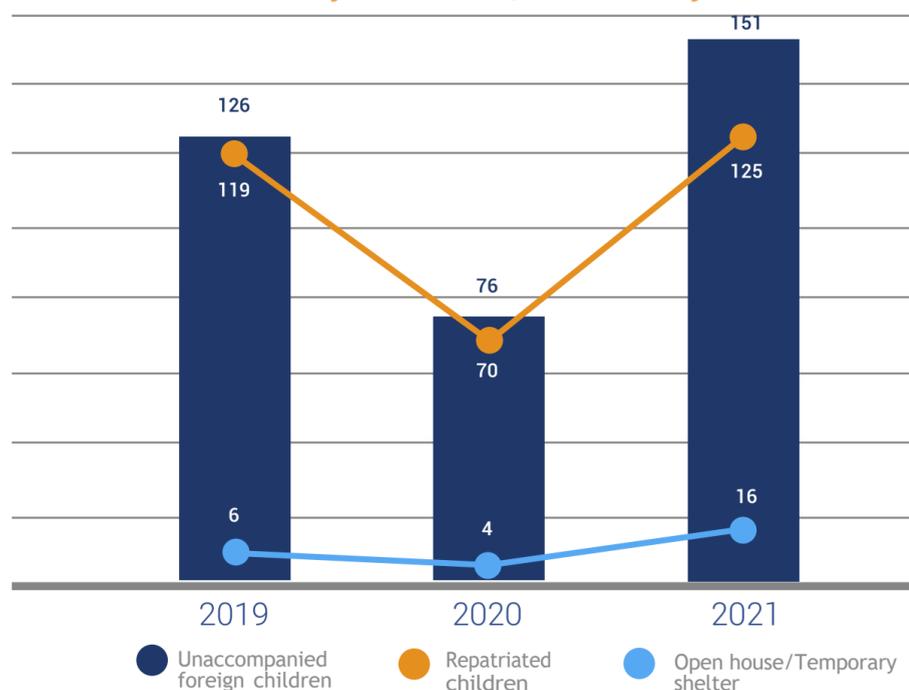
The majority were between the ages of 14 and 17 years (77%); in addition, 82% were honored. The main reasons for moving, like the Guatemalan children and adolescents, were the need for employment, family reunification, violence and family migration. 82

Despite the existence of this offer of assistance, humanitarian organizations have identified a worrying situation with unaccompanied children and adolescents in transit through Guatemala, who, fearing detention and subsequent deportation, avoid using the shelters for migrants and refugees, leaving them completely unprotected during transit. Instead, they prefer to spend the night on the streets or near churches where they may be victims of violence and crime. 83

Guatemala: an option to stay

The majority of children and adolescents in transit through Guatemala chose the United States (82%), Mexico (12%) and a small group did not know their destination (6%). 84 Faced with detention, a small percentage see Guatemala as an option to stay. From 2019 to May 2021, 7% of the 353 unaccompanied or separated children and adolescents in transit through Guatemala who were cared for by the Ministry of Social Welfare in the Casa Nuestras Raíces shelters were sent to an open-door shelter or temporary shelter by order of a competent judge to provide them with protection. 85 This percentage are children and adolescents who reported not being able to return to their country of origin because they were fleeing.

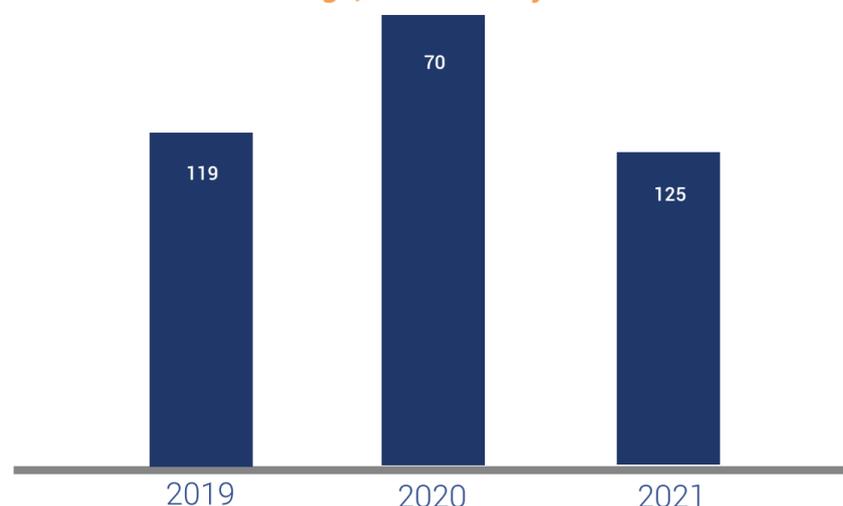
Unaccompanied foreign unaccompanied children and adolescents by court order, 2019 to May 2021



Source: Source: SBS, Public Information, Resolution: UIP 254-2021

Likewise, from 2019 to May 2021, 235 asylum applications were submitted by children under 12 years of age, of which 47% were from children from Honduras, 26% from El Salvador, 14% from Nicaragua and 33% from other countries (Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Egypt, Mexico and Venezuela). In addition, during this period the country recognized 39 children under 12 years of age as refugees. 86

Number of asylum applications from children under 12 years of age, 2019 to May 2021.



Source: Source: Guatemalan Migration Institute, Public Information: IGM-UIP Resolution 284-2021.

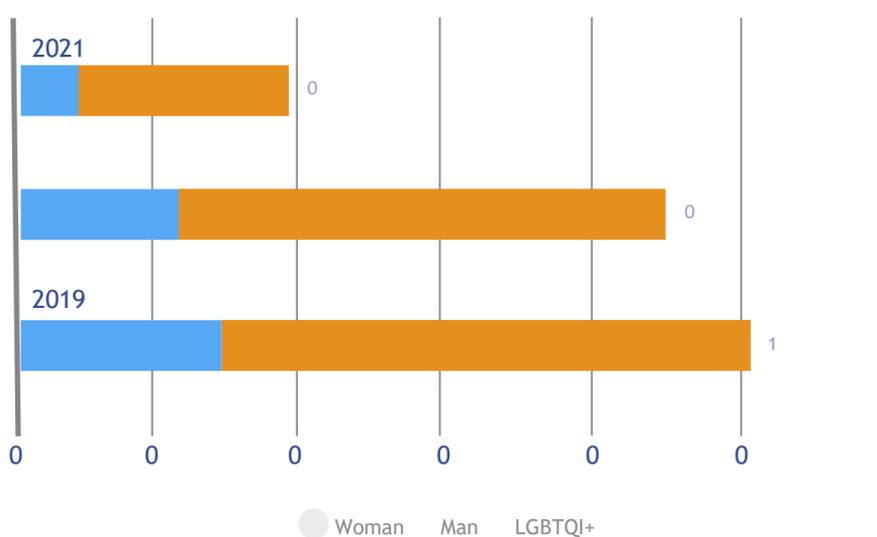
The time it takes to resolve an asylum request (approximately 1 year, 6 months to 2 years) places children and adolescents at social risk due to the lack of documents. Despite the efforts made by humanitarian organizations to raise awareness among service providers, there are cases of discrimination. On the other hand, if the adults who are a protection factor for the children do not have a job that allows them to cover the family's basic needs, the risk of lack of protection is high. 87

The most complex institutional challenge in the care of asylum-seeking children and adolescents is to facilitate referral to service providers so that they can access them. In the case of unaccompanied children and adolescents, the options are limited, either staying in Guatemala and being institutionalized or returning to their country of origin. It is important to emphasize that institutional weaknesses affect both Guatemalan and foreign children.

Return of Guatemalan children and adolescents

28,949 Guatemalan children and adolescents were deported from the United States and Mexico from January 2019 to May 2021, 21% from the United States and 79% from Mexico. ⁸⁸ Approximately 40% were children and adolescents deported as unaccompanied (11,512), of which 74% were male, 25% female and less than 1% LGBTIQ+; the majority were between the ages of 13 and 17 (85%); Mexico was the country that deported the most Guatemalan children and adolescents: 70% of the cases, followed by the United States with 25% and the remaining 5% were from other unspecified countries. ⁸⁹

Guatemalan children and adolescents deported by country and gender, 2019 to May 2021



Source: Source: SBS, Public Information, Resolution: UIP 254-2021, June 2021.

It is important to highlight that 56% of the unaccompanied children and adolescents who were deported from 2020 to June 2021 are considered indigenous. In addition, 51% are from the departments of San Marcos, Huehuetenango and Quiché. ⁹⁰

The main protection needs reported by deported children and adolescents are lack of family resources, gang violence, sexual violence, domestic violence, children with an Alba-Kenneth Alert, pregnant girls, extortion, document forgery, sexual orientation discrimination, children who do not live with their families, children who live with older partners. ⁹¹

On the other hand, there is reverse coyotaje, which has increased in recent years. These are cases of very young children (under 6 years of age) who traveled with a parent and managed to settle in the United States for a short time.

In the absence of support networks, the legal guardians realize that they cannot take care of the child and work at the same time; moreover, the cost of babysitters is high and they decide to send the child to someone who has U.S. residency or citizenship and is dedicated to making this type of trip. Upon entering the country, the children are identified by personnel from the Social Welfare Secretariat (SBS) for their protection and to initiate the process of family reunification, in addition, these minors enter the country as unaccompanied. ⁹²

Despite efforts to implement care routes, the processes continue to be incomplete. ⁹³ The institutions that provide direct attention to this population, such as the Secretariat of Social Welfare, the Secretariat of Social Works of the President's Wife and the Attorney General's Office, are generally overworked and centralized in urban areas; therefore, referrals for follow-up can take several months. On the other hand, the agencies that receive referrals are not exclusively dedicated to migrant children and must attend to all children's issues, further delaying the reintegration process; it is common that when the case is taken up again, the children can no longer be located, either because they started their journey again, changed their address or are no longer interested in the attention.

The Social Welfare Secretariat's "Quédate" Training Centers were created in response to the need to provide a viable and accessible option to enhance the skills and abilities at the community level of deported adolescents and those at risk of displacement. Unfortunately, there are only two in the entire country and their scope is limited. The social reintegration programs that exist in the country in the different ministries and secretariats are not always specific programs for children in a situation of human mobility; therefore, accessing them can be a long process.

Legal and social mechanisms for the protection of children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility.

There are several mechanisms for the care of children and adolescents in mobility contexts:

No	Mechanism	Target
1	Migration Code (Decree 44-2016)	It recognizes migration as a right, ⁹⁴ establishes the general route for the care of children and adolescents and the recognition of refugee status. Its content is based on international standards.
	Governmental Agreement 146-2014	It creates the Commission for the Comprehensive Care of Migrant Children and Adolescents, composed of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Secretariat of Social Welfare of the Presidency, the Attorney General's Office and the Secretariat of Social Works of the Presidency. Its purpose is to evaluate, promote and follow up on institutional or inter-institutional strategies, plans and programs to provide protection, assistance and ensure the fundamental rights of children and adolescents. In addition, the Commission is organized along four strategic lines of work: 1) Consular Protection and Repatriation 2) Reception and Psychosocial Care 3) Social Reintegration 4) Prevention. ⁹⁵
	National Migratory Authority Agreement No. 2-2019	Regulation of the procedure for the protection, determination and recognition of refugee status in the State of Guatemala.

On the other hand, thanks to the support of international cooperation, differentiated care protocols have been developed for dealing with children and adolescents in migration contexts:

No	Protocol	Target
1	National Protocol for the Reception and Care of Migrant Children and Adolescents in Guatemala.	The different inter-institutional care routes for unaccompanied children and adolescents in the context of unaccompanied migration and the care of their families who are being deported are presented.
	Psychosocial protocol for consular care and protection of migrant children and adolescents with rights-based approach	Provides guidelines for consular protection of children and adolescents in migration contexts in the United States and Mexico.
	Protocol for the reception of unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents:	Establishes guidelines for the reception of unaccompanied Guatemalan children and adolescents in the context of unaccompanied migration, attended by the Social Welfare Secretariat.
	Protocol for the integral care of migrant families	Provides psychosocial tools to identify situations of vulnerability in deported Guatemalan families, especially by establishing protection mechanisms for children and adolescents served by the Secretariat of Social Works of the President's Wife.

Given the increase in the number of children and adolescents in need of international protection in the country, strategies have begun to be proposed to provide an alternative to institutionalization as a protection measure. In this regard, a first step was the preparation of the **Protocol for the care of unaccompanied or separated children and adolescents in contexts of human mobility, asylum seekers, refugees and others in need of international protection, integrated in temporary foster families.**⁹⁶

Responses from civil society organizations and international organizations

Humanitarian organizations have played a relevant role in the approach to children and adolescents in the context of mobility from different spheres of action:

Protection mechanisms for children and adolescents: UNICEF has contributed to strengthening the national system for the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents. At the community level, the Municipal Protection Systems seek to coordinate and coordinate security and justice institutions, prevent violence, exploitation and abuse of children and adolescents, as well as strengthen municipal offices for the protection of children and adolescents.

UNHCR, through partners, assists in the identification and care of children and adolescents in need of international protection, advises on the asylum system, provides humanitarian, health and shelter care,⁹⁸ and has initiated a sensitization and training process for judges who handle cases of unaccompanied children and adolescents in the context of unaccompanied mobility.

The Protected Path Program seeks to mitigate the protection needs of asylum-seeking children in shelters along the route.

The program is a regional program coordinated by the Child Fund, Plan International and Educo.

Integration and community reintegration of children and adolescents: The migration program of the Pop Noj Association has a component of accompaniment in the reception and community reintegration of deported children and adolescents located in Huehuetenango. Save the Children is currently working in one of the border areas with El Salvador to raise awareness and approach host communities.

Institutional strengthening: UNICEF has provided technical support in the development of care protocols for children and adolescents in contexts of mobility, and has provided human resources for the care of children and adolescents in contexts of human mobility in government institutions. Misioneros de San Carlos Scala-Brinianos, provides direct care to children and adolescents in contexts of mobility and their families, assisting in the implementation of comprehensive care routes and protocols.



Monitoring and advocacy for children's rights: CI-PRODENI's Observatory for Children's Rights constantly monitors the situation of children and adolescents in the country and publishes periodic bulletins on migration and child displacement; it also carries out advocacy and technical assistance actions with guarantors of rights.¹⁰¹ PAMI, through the different projects it develops, seeks to encourage the participation of children and adolescents and promotes the fulfillment of their rights.¹⁰²

It is important to clarify that this is not an exhaustive list of the response by humanitarian organizations, but rather, they are actions that exemplify the interventions in the different areas.¹⁰³

Challenges identified for integral protection

Humanitarian organizations in the country have identified the main challenges to guarantee the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents in contexts of Guatemalan and foreign mobility:

Articulate a national policy for the integral protection of children and adolescents that allows for the coordination of the institutions that guarantee rights.

Establish a single mechanism for case management to unify information, streamline processes and connect the services available to children and adolescents at risk or victims of rights violations in order to achieve their effective integration and reintegration.

In addition, based on the needs detected, special, decentralized, cross-sectoral social protection programs should be created, centered on the principle of best interest and guaranteeing the restitution, access and enjoyment of rights.

It should also be borne in mind that the approach strategies need to have a regional component in order to propose common and coordinated strategies, with interventions that are standardized for each country.

Despite the progress made in the protection of children and adolescents in contexts of human mobility in the country, there are still gaps to be closed, such as awareness-raising and professionalization of state actors, identification of the different profiles of children and adolescents in contexts of mobility that coexist in the country and the existing protection needs.

Given the constant detentions in the national territory, an increase in the identification of children and adolescents in the context of mobility is expected, for which it is necessary to have specialized personnel to avoid re-victimization, family separation, excessive judicialization of cases and institutionalization. It is also important to have specialized shelters for children and adolescents with international protection needs and in transit through the country, since the existing ones are saturated with the care of deported children and adolescents.

To raise contextualized approaches to the new phenomena of human mobility in the country, such as the case of groups of migrants and refugees stranded in the territory due to the militarization of borders, a situation that has been growing since the massive flows of people in 2018, known as the "caravanas" and mobility restrictions by Covid-19.



HONDURAS

HONDURAS

Triggering factors for the flow of children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility

According to the latest update of the National Statistics Institute (INE, 2021), there are 9,770,000 people in the country, of which 38% are children (3,496,770); 50.5% boys and 49.5% girls.

59.8% of the child population is in multidimensional poverty (2.1 million) and 1 out of every 4 children and adolescents is in extreme poverty. Of the population, 52.6% is concentrated in urban areas and 47.4% in rural areas. It should be noted that 46.3% of children reside in four departments: Cortés, Francisco Morazán, Atlántida and Yoro. In addition, 77% of children and adolescents lived in households characterized by high levels of poverty in 2019.¹⁰⁴

In light of these data, it can be determined that the access of children and adolescents to the right to education, health and a life free of violence faces a series of multidimensional challenges.

The impact of the COVID19 pandemic and extreme weather events in 2020 increased barriers to access to education. As a result of these two factors, the reactivation of on-site classes is still on hold and it is estimated that up to 42 schools were severely affected by tropical storms Eta and Iota; 114,015 students were affected and more than 700 educational facilities were damaged and some of them are still functioning as shelters.

Apart from the emergencies of 2020, education in Honduras was facing structural challenges even before that. Factors such as coverage, quality of learning and the poor state of educational infrastructure are some of the challenges the country already faced.

In addition, education in times of the Covid-19 faces the challenge of low Internet access coverage, with only 16% of the population having access to the Internet in urban areas and 1.9% in rural areas.

On the other hand, children and adolescents have lost access to a space that for some of them represented a safe place where they could stay while their mothers and fathers worked.¹⁰⁵

However, it cannot be ignored that schools in Honduras have also become a risk factor for violent acts; according to the National Violence Observatory, between 2010 and 2018, 1,522 homicides against students were recorded in educational institutions located in areas with the presence and control of gang groups.¹⁰⁶ Violence in schools has become a common situation and part of this was reflected by USAID in the 2017 study on factors associated with academic performance:¹⁰⁷

11% of students surveyed reported the presence of gang members once or more during the school year and 19% in the environment.

1 in 5 students was a victim of violence on the way to or from school. 27% did not feel safe in their neighborhood. 1 in 3 students was a victim of bullying.

Likewise, the Violence against Children and Adolescents Survey conducted in 2017 identified a series of protection risks detected in the surveyed population:¹⁰⁸

Approximately 16.2% of females and 9.9% of males experienced sexual violence before the age of 18.

Physical violence was the most common type of violence experienced in childhood, affecting three out of ten females and males. More females than males experienced physical violence by a parent or adult guardian and more males than females experienced physical violence by a peer.

Sexual violence resulted in pregnancy in 15.8% of the cases.

At least one in five girls married before age 18

One out of three youths experienced food insecurity

Social risks and multidimensional vulnerability of children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility.

As noted in the previous section, children and adolescents face a complex scenario in which it is difficult for them to access and exercise their rights, which can be a trigger for internal displacement or leaving the country.

According to the updated *Internal Displacement Characterization Study* published in 2019, 58,550 households, comprised of 247,090 people, were internally displaced in the country between January 2004 and August 2018. That is, almost 3 out of every 100 Hondurans live in a displaced household. Among the main findings of this study, it was established that forced recruitment and violence are factors of expulsion, with the most vulnerable profiles being children, adolescents and young people between the ages of 8 and 21.

Forced recruitment of children and adolescents

Although it is difficult to establish exact figures on this phenomenon, the results and analyses of different organizations point to the fact that it is a problem that has a cross-cutting impact on the rights of children and adolescents and constitutes one of the triggers that generate forced displacement of children and adolescents and their families.¹⁰⁹

"The criminal groups in Honduras capture children and adolescents and use them to extort money from their relatives in the United States. So there is no personal or legal security. There is the issue that they go alone on the road and they have no support to be able to make these trips".

Humanitarian organization based on El Salvador

The Norwegian Refugee Council document published in 2016 characterizes Honduras as a country with "invisibilized"¹¹⁰ internal mobility. This reference is due to the lack of media coverage and awareness of the problem of the multiple forms of violence that affect vulnerable populations. The situation of children and adolescents in 2014, according to this document, is that many people do not report their movement for fear of reprisals from gangs.

This means that there is also no accurate and recent record to measure the real impact of children and adolescents displaced by violence. However, from qualitative analyses by the UNHCR in 2019 (Idem), gang strategies for the recruitment of children and adolescents related to their condition of multiple vulnerabilities have been identified, as specified in the following table:

Identified strategy - Vulnerability conditions and risk factors	
Camaraderie, friendship and affectionate relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family violence - Lack of care by fathers, mothers and guardians - Affective deficiencies generated by abuse in the home
Protection and acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Victims of bullying - Victims of abuse and mistreatment - Belonging and identity building needs
Seduction and deception through money and physical integrity of oneself or one's family members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poverty - Lack of employment and opportunities for personal and professional development - Lack of education
Induction to drug use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic violence - Lack of care by fathers, mothers and guardians - Lack of leisure and recreation alternatives
Threats to the life and physical integrity of themselves or family members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Girls and young women attractive to gangs - Absence of parents due to deficiencies in the reconciliation of family and work or migration - Strong gang presence and lack of protection and security mechanisms

Source: UNHCR, Honduras, [Estudio de caracterización de desplazamiento forzado por violencia](#), 2019.

Persuasion and control through strategies of power and coercion, as well as gender-based violence through situations of sexual harassment and abuse are some of the crimes committed by gangs to initiate the forced recruitment of children and adolescents.

Main protection risks influencing the migration and displacement of children and adolescents

The vicissitudes and difficulties along the way intensify and the patterns of violence are repeated.

"One of the main risks is gender-based violence against girls. On the other hand, there is also domestic violence; even if they go in caravans, domestic violence is always something that manifests itself. The violence exercised by parents against their children. On the other hand, there is also the fact that they are assaulted on the road and 90% of the children and adolescents say that they have been victims of violence on the road, either by security agents and external agents or criminals".

Humanitarian organization based on Honduras

This is an explanatory table of the causes of forced displacement of children and adolescents assisted as a protection action in the field. According to those interviewed, the trend for 2021 has intensified, however, there is still no quantitative data to show this.

On the other hand, among the main protection risks, it is also necessary to point out deportations as a possibility of re-entering the cycle of violence for which they were previously forced to leave. According to the statistics portal of the Sistema Integral de Atención al Migrante Retornado (SIAMIR) as of October 9, 2021, there are a total of 346,341 Honduran returnees, of which 64,607 are children and adolescents. 22,089 are women and girls, representing 34.35% of the total, and 42,218 are men and boys, representing 65.65% of this population¹¹¹.

Cause of displacement	2016		2017		2018		2019		Total	
	Children	Girls	Children	Girls	Children	Girls	Children	Girls	Children	Girls
Forced recruitment		0		0		1				
Sexual violence	0		0		0		0		0	
Have a family member involved in organized crime					1			5		
Witnesses to a crime		0			1	1	1			
Trafficking in persons		0	1	0		1		1		
Domestic violence	0		0	5	0	1	0	1	0	
Threats and physical aggression				0		1	0	0		
Total									86	

Legal and social mechanisms for the protection of children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility.

Social protection needs of children and adolescents

Special protection subsumes the particular needs of children and adolescents. The main one is self-identification of patterns of violence and violations of fundamental rights. Therefore, it is very important for children to be able to identify and know when their rights are being violated. According to a humanitarian field assistant, *"children by their nature tend to think of nice and good things, when unfortunately the context of migration is not like that. Migration has phases. At the social level there are reintegration needs. When they are in the return phase, they arrive in worse conditions. When they return, they lose the chance to go back to school and cannot return to their community of origin, but to others"*¹¹².

Care is differentiated and there are significant inequalities according to gender, disability or whether they belong to indigenous groups. It is important to provide multi-dimensional humanitarian protection with a differential approach to guarantee their physical and moral integrity. According to a humanitarian assistant, *"we need them to have good integration; access to health and education. Children and adolescents do not have access to health care in the destination countries because they are afraid of being returned. It is also necessary to work on the protection law through the State and a legal framework to be enforced", and regulatory frameworks are also needed in Honduras because "unfortunately it passed the Opinion Commission, but it has not been scheduled in the Legislative Assembly"* (referring to the Draft Law for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence in 2021¹¹³).

In addition to the expulsion factors mentioned above, according to the latest rounds of updating of the displacement monitoring matrix developed by the International Organization for Migration, one of the main causes for the displacement of children and adolescents is family reunification.¹¹⁴

Children and adolescents deported after the administrative family reunification process

Despite government and non-governmental organization initiatives to enable children to adapt and fully exercise their fundamental rights, the inability to guarantee a repatriation process is an alarming problem. There are state actions for the persons and daughters of children and adolescents.

deported persons. However, the contexts in which the interviews are conducted are not safe, nor do they respect privacy, which can lead to unreliable or biased information. Likewise, upon return to their place of origin, there is no evaluation or monitoring to ensure that children and adolescents are in safe areas free from violence.

However, there is a legal and regulatory framework that seeks to provide protection responses from both a regional and local approach. The following table shows the regional regulations and, in particular, Honduran legal regulations focused on the protection of children and adolescents.

Legal framework and regional regulations	National legal and regulatory framework
Procedure for the Safe and Orderly Repatriation of Minors to Central America	The Protocol for the Repatriation of Children and Adolescents Victims of or Vulnerable to Trafficking in Persons in Honduras ¹¹⁵
The Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of the United States of America, the Republic of El Salvador, the Republic of Guatemala, the Republic of Honduras and the Republic of Nicaragua, for the Dignified, Orderly, Expeditious and Safe Return of Central American Nationals Migrating by Land	Organic Law of the Hondureño Institute of Childhood and Family ¹¹⁶
Regional Guidelines for the Care of Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Adolescents in Cases of Repatriation	The Honduran Code of Childhood and Adolescence ¹¹⁷

Source: own elaboration based on information collected from the UN Refugee Agency [UNHCR](#), 2021.

Responses from the organizations of civil society and international organizations

What efforts have been made in the country to assist migrant children?

Efforts are being made by state and non-governmental organizations to try to ensure the safe repatriation of children and adolescents. The following table details the involvement of these organizations:

Program	Joint Child Migrant Task Force
Official Organizations	<p>Childhood, Adolescence and Family Directorate</p> <p>DINAF Secretariat of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation</p> <p>Secretariat of the Presidency</p> <p>National Women's Institute INAM</p> <p>the Secretariats of Development and Social Inclusion SEDIS</p> <p>Human Rights Justice Government and Decentralization</p> <p>Secretariat of Education</p> <p>Secretariat of Health</p> <p>Secretary of Labor and Social Security</p> <p>General Directorate of Transportation</p> <p>COPECO Standing Committee on Contin- gencies</p>
Autonomous organizations	<p>National Commissioner for Human Rights</p> <p>Public Prosecutor's Office, through the Special Prosecutor's Office for Children's Affairs</p> <p>National Registry of Persons</p> <p>National Police</p> <p>Honduran Council of Private Enterprise, COHEP</p> <p>National Forum on Migration in Honduras, FONAMIH</p> <p>Mennonite Social Action Commission CASM</p> <p>First Lady's Office</p>

This joint effort seeks to provide immediate attention to deported children and adolescents, as well as to facilitate the process of repatriation and follow-up to their homes or foster homes. In addition, minimum standards of legal and health care and educational reintegration in the communities of origin are identified. The organizations mentioned in the table also aim to implement protocols and programs for immediate attention, in addition to guiding, formulating, managing and providing follow-up to this population profile.

Challenges identified for the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents

Child protection actors have identified important challenges in the protection of children and adolescents in conditions of mobility:

Strengthen national legal frameworks and their harmonization with regional protection instruments to ensure the incorporation and application of international child protection standards;

Strengthen the implementation of protocols related to child protection and the institutions that make up the national protection system through a human rights approach;

Promote and/or strengthen protection mechanisms and responses that are inclusive, accessible and culturally sensitive from an age, gender and diversity perspective;

Ensure that reintegration processes for deported children and adolescents promote the centrality of protection and are integrated into existing public policies and social programs;

Promote migration and asylum policies that are friendly and sensitive to the specific needs and rights of children and adolescents, promoting the right to seek and receive asylum, comprehensive protection and best interests.

Promote a coordinated and comprehensive protection response to mitigate the risk of forced recruitment of children and adolescents and other rights violations promoted by criminal organizations.

Source: Own elaboration, based on information from the National Center for Social Sector Information, CENISS 2021.



MEXICO

MEXICO

Triggering factors of the flow of children and adolescents in situations of vulnerability of human mobility to the United States and Mexico

Mexico is a country with approximately 126 million people, 31% of whom are children and adolescents. Specifically, the number of female children and adolescents is slightly higher than that of male children and adolescents (around half a million). 118

According to the Index of the Rights of Mexican Children 2018,119 the country experiences a generalized non-compliance with their rights. This categorization emphasizes the need to make progress in terms of public policies and state legal frameworks to align a national system that effectively contributes to their protection.

Following the trends shown for 2018,120 according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for 2019:

5% of children between 5 and 11 years of age suffer from obesity and overweight.

80% of children in the sixth year of primary school do not reach the expected level of learning according to their educational level.

63% of children between 1 and 14 years of age have suffered domestic violence.

18% of children under 5 years of age do not have an adequate level of physical, socioemotional or learning development.

50% of children and adolescents live in poverty, and 60% lack access to social security. 121

The conditions of violence, poverty and lack of access to rights of this population have been aggravated by the increase in the needs of children and adolescents caused by the pandemic, which have not been adequately addressed by the Mexican State. 122 For example, up to the beginning of August, 60,928 infections and 613 deaths of children and adolescents due to Covid-19 were registered, with the most affected group being those between 0 and 5 years of age. 123

Violence against children manifests itself in different spheres of public and private life. In the private sphere, 63% of children and adolescents have experienced some form of violent punishment; 10% of adolescents between 14 and 17 years of age report having suffered some form of sexual violence, while adolescent girls report that they have suffered some form of sexual violence.

women were the most violated by people in their family environments, including their mothers (24%) and fathers (21%). In the public sphere, crimes such as homicides, sexual abuse, extortion and kidnappings against children and adolescents were the most frequent:

Girls and adolescent women: kidnapping (98%), child abduction (75%), trafficking in persons (75%) and trafficking in minors (56%).

Boys and male adolescents: homicides (79%), kidnappings (66%), injuries (66%) and extortions (52%).

However, children and adolescents are also forced or coerced to participate in the activities of organized crime groups or self-defense groups, either as coyotes or migrant guides. 124 According to the co-founder and spokesperson of Reinserta, a non-governmental organization, there are between 35,000 and 45,000 children and adolescents recruited by criminal organizations. 125

Researchers have pointed out that the Mexican State has not been concerned with addressing the symptoms of violence, but not its causes, which may lie in the poverty and lack of access to rights faced by children and adolescents. 126 In this regard, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), for the year 2019, 11.4% of children and adolescents between 5 and 17 years of age (approximately 3.2 million) were victims of child labor, of which 60% were working in occupations that were not permitted because they were under the minimum age or because they were dangerous occupations. With respect to the reasons for having to work at an early age, the following stood out: to help financially in their households (27%), to pay for school (19%), to contribute to the household with work (16%), to contribute to the household with money (13%) and to pay debts (12%). In addition, 99% reported working 14 hours or more. 127

Likewise, it is estimated that almost 5 million children and adolescents are out of the educational system. 128 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact it had and will continue to have on the Mexican economy, it is expected that these figures and percentages will increase considerably by 2021.129 There are other considerable problems facing children and adolescents in Mexico. For example, from 1995 to 2021, it is estimated that there will be approximately

12,080 missing children and adolescents, of which 879 cases occurred in the last year, a record number for surpassing the 840 cases reported in 2017. These disappearances could be linked to human trafficking, sexual abuse, theft and abduction.¹³⁰

In addition, of the 2 million births registered in 2019, 16.6% (348,046) were in those under 20 years of age: 339,539 in adolescents and 8,507 births in girls under 15 years of age. And 10% of maternal deaths occurred in those under 20 years of age.¹³¹

On the other hand, it is estimated that, due to the pandemic, **more than 131,000 children and adolescents are deprived of parental care.**¹³² The latter is a problem that has worsened.¹³³ In addition to the lack of justice in emblematic cases, such as the fire at the ABC Day Care Center due to insecurity and irregularities that prevailed in day care centers run by the Mexican Social Security Institute in the country.¹³⁴

Children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility in Mexico

The number of children and adolescents moving through, from and within Mexico is increasingly significant. The data show that children and adolescents move for reasons associated with their economic situation, the violence that prevails in their places of origin, and the search for reunification with their families,¹³⁵ traveling not necessarily accompanied but also independently.¹³⁶ This is an important point to mention because, until recently, the mobilization of children and adolescents was assumed to be a collateral effect of the migration or displacement of their families.¹³⁷

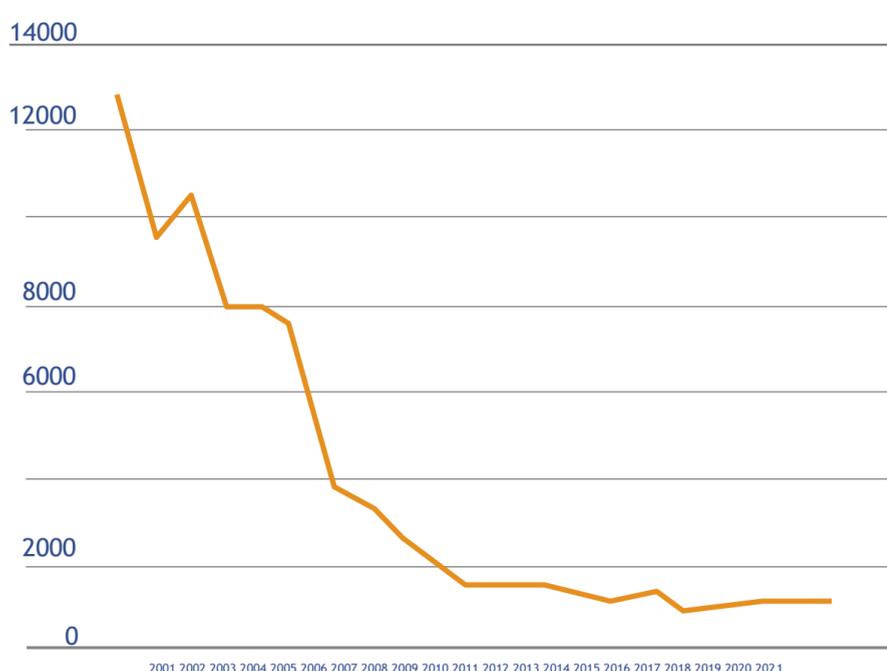
Mexican migrant and internally displaced children and adolescents

Generally, Mexican children and adolescents move from areas with high levels of poverty, some of which, for the same reasons, have participated in historical migration flows between Mexico and the United States. However, in recent years there has been an increase in the number of children and adolescents moving from areas with high levels of violence, including armed violence, the latter generally caused by the activities of organized crime.¹³⁸

In this context, hundreds of children and adolescents born in Mexico leave their places of origin every day to go to other places within the country, but mainly to other countries.

in the United States. On average from January 2001 to June 2021, children and adolescents accounted for about 10% of all repatriations from the United States to Mexico.¹³⁹ While with respect to Mexican children and adolescents who move to the interior of the country to work in agricultural activities, which account for 30% of child labor in the country,¹⁴⁰ it is estimated that for the 2017-2018 season, they made up 50% of the total number of people who migrated to northern Mexico to work in the fields.¹⁴¹

Annual repatriation of Mexican children and adolescents from the United States (2001-June 2021)



Source: Own elaboration based on information from [UPMRIP](#), July 2021.

It is important to mention that, although most of the returns from the United States are made through northern Mexican border cities such as Nogales, Nuevo Laredo, Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez and Reynosa, in recent years deportations of children and adolescents have also begun to be made to other cities in the interior of the country.

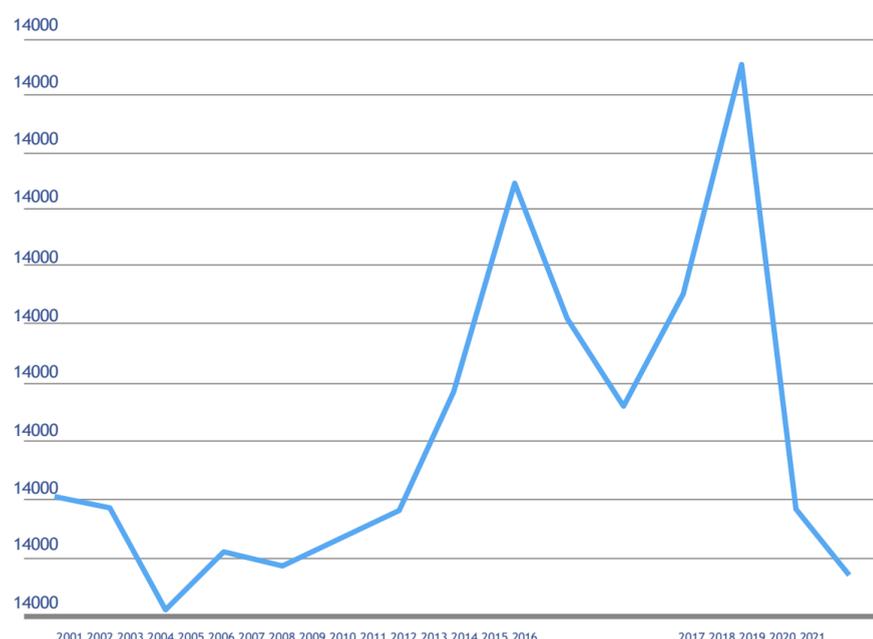
Migrant children and children in need of international protection

Since 2008, civil society organizations, international organizations and, more recently, government authorities have been monitoring the increase in the participation of children and adolescents in the mixed movements through Mexico, mainly towards the United States.¹⁴² In the case of detentions and returns carried out in Mexico by the INM, two years stand out, 2015 and 2019, as those with the highest number of children and adolescents.

The first with 36,921 and the second with 46,777 events, the largest number of children detained and subsequently returned to their countries of origin by Mexican authorities. In contrast to the flow of Mexican children and adolescents, foreign children and adolescents made up between 20% and 32% of the total flow between 2015 and 2019. It was precisely in the latter year that there was the highest number of detentions and returns since at least 2007.¹⁴³

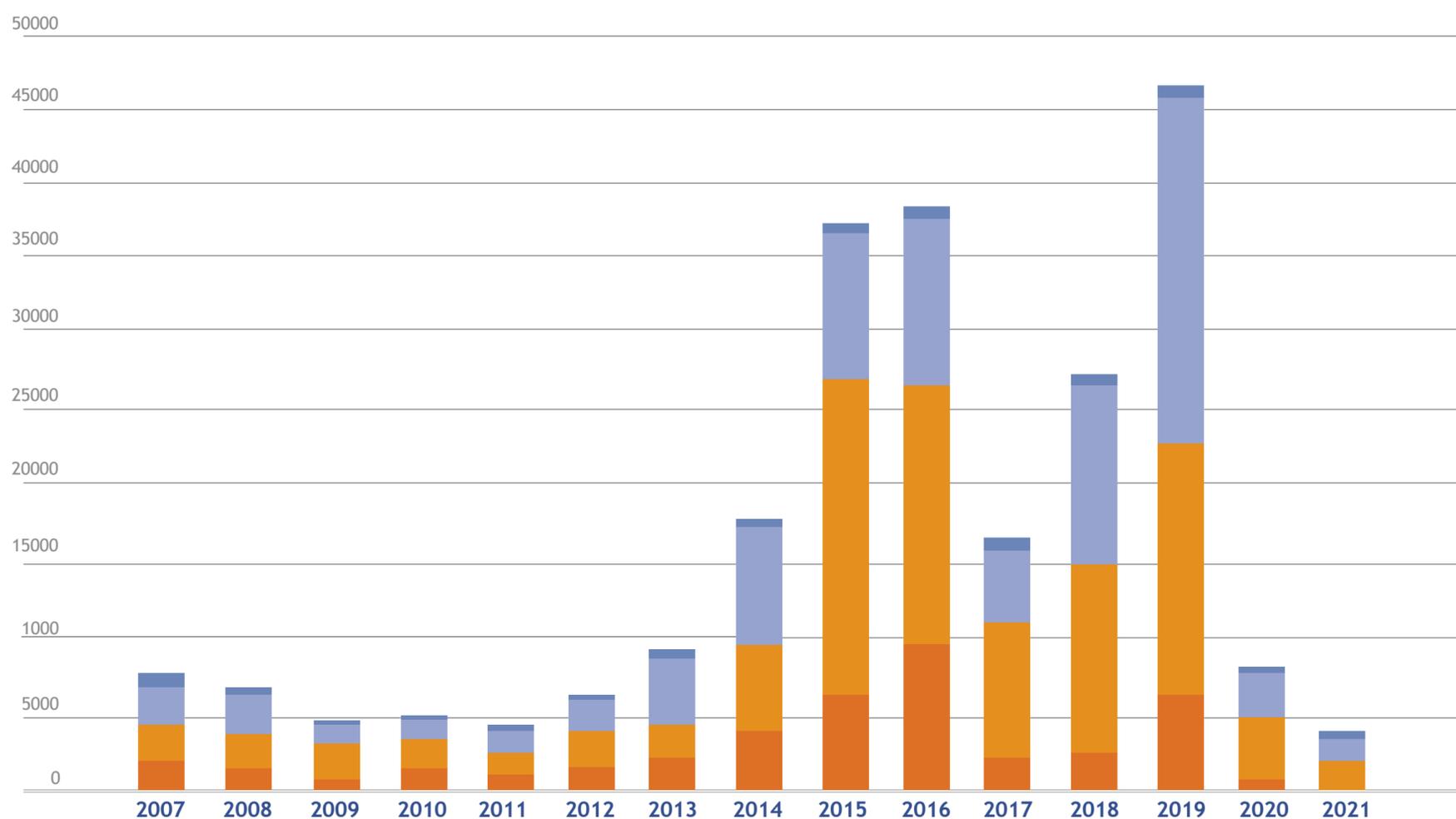
According to INM figures for this period, between 95% and 98% of refoulement events correspond to children born in NCA countries, especially Guatemala, which was surpassed by Honduras in 2008, 2013, 2014 and 2019.

Annual repatriations of Mexican children and adolescents from the United States (2001-june 2021)



Source: Own elaboration based on information from [UPMRIP](#), July 2021.

Annual returns of foreign-born children and adolescents from Mexico (2007 - 2021)



Year	Others	Honduras	Guatemala	El Salvador
2007	253	2833	3083	1049
2008	253	2915	2486	976
2009	253	1385	2073	527
2010	253	1692	1933	972
2011	253	1288	1935	770
2012	253	2169	2393	1280
2013	253	3686	3012	1703
2014	248	7967	6196	3758
2015	424	9884	19029	7584
2016	796	11307	16726	9726
2017	342	5086	9118	2547
2018	354	11634	12492	2709
2019	858	23067	16341	6511
2020	858	3332	4491	680
2021	858	1144	1458	216

Source: Own elaboration based on information from [UPMRIP](#), July 2021.

Figures provided by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) also show a significant increase in apprehensions of children at the Mexico border, particularly for FY 2019 and so far in FY 2021. Unfortunately, CBP does not share the numbers of accompanied children it detains, so the numbers of children are limited to unaccompanied children. Likewise, while CBP publishes the numbers of family units detained, it does not indicate which of these units are comprised of children.

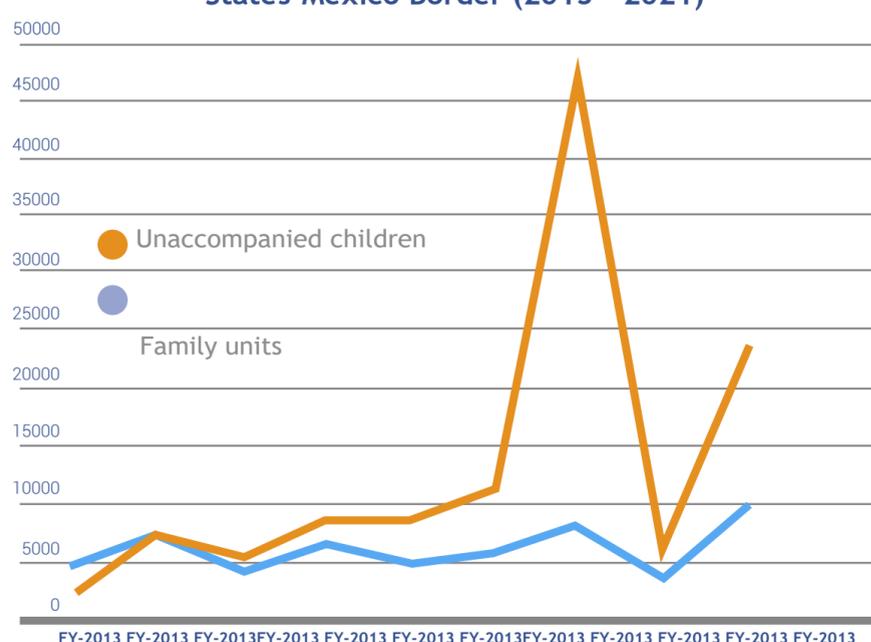
In the first case, this increase was marked by the appearance and arrival of people, mostly from the NCA, who traveled through the so-called migrant caravans.

In the latter case, the increase is framed, in part, by the worsening of living conditions in places of origin, the changes made by Joe Biden's administration in terms of immigration policy, which have been read by people as an opportunity to move to the United States, as well as in the case of the administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who has prohibited the detention of children and adolescents and their accompanying family members.

The peaks in detentions and returns recorded by the INM between 2011 and 2016 and between 2017 and 2019 were widely documented not only through the statistics provided by the Mexican authorities, but also by civil society organizations, particularly shelters and safe houses, which provide care to the multiple profiles that make up the mixed movements in the country.¹⁴⁴

Something similar is happening with the peak of apprehensions registered by the CBP in the United States, a situation that has also generated concern among non-governmental organizations and international agencies that provide care to children and adolescents, especially due to the risky and precarious situations they usually experience during their displacements and once they are awaiting the resolution of their migratory situation.¹⁴⁵

Apprehensions of Children and Family Units at the United States-Mexico Border (2013 - 2021)



Source: Own elaboration based on information from [UPMRIP](#), July 2021.

Risks and vulnerabilities of children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility.

Migrant and displaced children and adolescents, especially those who travel or seek to settle in countries other than their own, face situations of risk, precariousness and extreme vulnerability throughout their migratory process. The main risks they face according to their profile are shown below:

Migrant children and children in need of international protection in transit

As is the case with adult migrants and persons in need of international protection, particularly those who have not initiated a refugee process in the country, the situations of risk, precariousness and vulnerability experienced by children and adolescents are often exacerbated in Mexico due to the clandestine conditions of their travel conditions, where a self-protection strategy to avoid detection and deportation by the authorities is to go as unnoticed as possible.¹⁴⁶ In this sense, children and adolescents are exposed to situations of physical, mental and sexual violence; they can be victims of robbery, kidnapping, murder, disappearance; or fall into trafficking, smuggling and labor exploitation networks while trying to reach the United States.¹⁴⁷

Children and adolescents in transit also have to cope with the lack of access to food and water, shelter and hygiene services, as well as medical and psychological services, and legal assistance.¹⁴⁸ These situations can be faced either at liberty, while they are on the move, or in migration stations or shelters set up along migratory routes, where, in addition, they often face overcrowding. On the other hand, due to the increase in waiting times for processing applications for international protection and migratory regularization, children and adolescents have remained for up to months in shelters. These facilities are not usually specialized to attend to this population, so children and adolescents do not usually receive psychological, educational, recreational and recreational care, all of which are recommended for the optimal development of children and adolescents.¹⁴⁹ This situation also forces children and adolescents to stay for prolonged and undetermined periods in places with high levels of crime, violence and insecurity.¹⁵⁰

Finally, there are cases in which parents decide to send their children to cross the border and/or turn themselves in to the U.S. authorities.¹⁵¹ Family separation actions that can be traumatic, both for the children and for the parents.

their families, causing problems such as insomnia, concentration difficulties, sudden mood swings, anxiety and constant stress, among others.¹⁵² Added to this are migration and international protection procedures that do not ensure minimum standards in terms of guaranteeing the rights of migrant and refugee children and adolescents, exposing them to traumatic situations, which often result in lasting impacts on their mental health and psychosocial well-being. The latter have been categorized by pediatricians as torture,¹⁵³ as they intentionally inflict physical and/or psychological pain or suffering with the consent and/or approval of the authorities and for purposes of coercion, intimidation, punishment and/or deterrence.¹⁵⁴

Migrant children and adolescents in need of international protection in a Mexican settlement

Migrant children and children in need of international protection who are in the process of settling in Mexico also face considerable risks, vulnerabilities and barriers to access services.

Particularly, when trying to integrate into the educational system¹⁵⁵ and due to their incorporation into labor activities that, as previously described, can put their lives at risk.¹⁵⁶ For example, the 2017 Enpore Survey identified 55 adolescent refugees between 15 and 17 years of age, of which 14.6% reported to be working, while 67% of school-age children and adolescents (134) reported not studying due to lack of documentation required by educational institutions.¹⁵⁷

Mexican children and adolescents deported

In the case of Mexican children and adolescents who have been deported or repatriated, they must face institutional red tape and bureaucracy, lack of resources and institutional weakness in the reintegration process. Mexican children and adolescents who have lived practically all their lives in the United States do not have sufficient options for their integration. For example, they do not always have translators and personnel to provide them with medium-term accompaniment to support their integration process.¹⁵⁹ This situation becomes even more serious when the deported children and adolescents fled the country for reasons of violence, since returning to their place of origin entails a high risk of re-victimization.¹⁶⁰

Foreign migrant children and adolescents

With regard to this population, it is important to consider that they are particularly vulnerable to the situations that occur to their parents, for example, the constant fear of their parents being deported and of their own deportation. This is compounded by acculturation processes, most of the time abrupt and violent, which do not allow children to adapt adequately to their new environment. In this sense, these events have considerable repercussions on their development and well-being, affecting their physical and mental health, as well as the relevant establishment of the socio-affective relationships that they will establish later in their lives, regardless of where they are.¹⁶¹

It goes without saying that conditions have worsened with the Covid-19 pandemic, further exacerbating protection risks and access to care services¹⁶²

Legal and social mechanisms for the protection of children and adolescents in situations of human mobility

The main focus of U.S. and Mexican migration policies has been the containment and deportation of migrants, including children and adolescents. Mexico stands out not only for its apprehension, but also for its detention in migrant holding centers administered by the INM throughout the country.

However, the governments of Mexico and the United States have begun to implement policies aimed at improving protection and access to assistance for children, largely in response to advocacy by civil society organizations and international agencies.

Family reunification and non-detention of migrant and displaced children and adolescents

In 2014, the Government of Mexico approved the General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (LGDNNA), which prohibits the detention of migrant and refugee children and adolescents. Following the stipulations of international law, the LGDNNA Regulation establishes that no child, accompanied or unaccompanied, should be detained in immigration detention centers to ensure the best interests of the child.¹⁶³ Despite this, it continued to do so because the Migration Law (LM) allowed it to do so, refusing to stop doing so until said law was reformed.¹⁶⁴

Reforms to the LM and the Law on Refugees, Complementary Protection and Political Asylum (LR) re- forced the prohibition of detention of children and adolescents and entered into force in January 2021,¹⁶⁵ stipulating that the federal and state Offices of the Attorney General for the Protection of Children and Adolescents (PPNNA), the National System for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents (SIPINNA) and the National System for the Integral Development of the Family (SN-DIF) had six months to implement the necessary guidelines to protect children and adolescents, Children and Adolescents (SIPINNA) and the National System for the Integral Development of the Family (SN-DIF) had six months to implement the necessary guidelines to protect migrant and displaced children and adolescents and their families, who should now be transferred to SNDIF instead of being detained in migrant detention centers. In line with this process, the creation of the first center specialized in caring for migrant and displaced children and adolescents in the north of the country was reported.¹⁶⁶

This process has also made it possible to advance the implementation of an alternative care model for migrant and refugee children and adolescents, which consists of four stages: 1) identification; 2) first reception; 3) second reception; and 4) exit (reintegration or accompaniment towards independent living) and seeks to guarantee their rights, attend to their specific needs and offer them life opportunities.¹⁶⁷

THE STAGES OF RECEPTION

Identification

INM: maximum 24 hours - cover basic needs - channel the child to a first reception center. **DIF:** Identification of the child through the work of the child care center - Immediately refer the child to a first reception center.

First reception

CAS of first reception for a maximum of 45 days:

- PPNNA designs a plan for protection and restitution of rights
- DIF/CAS prepares a first draft of the individualized life plan, based on the plan for the protection and restitution of rights.

Second reception

Family Modalities

Kinship care: formalizing foster care legally
External foster family: selected and trained by DIF/PPNNA

Residential Modalities

CAS (public or private) of second home for children and adolescents:

- who will spend more time in Mexico
- that will foster community participation and integration

Departmental group for children and adolescents (public and private) with:

- special needs
- adolescents in the process of autonomy

Egress

Family reintegration or accompaniment to independent living

Despite advances in Mexican policies, the challenge for effective implementation remains complex,¹⁶⁸ since, for example, the National Human Rights Commission continues to issue recommendations to the relevant authorities not to expose children and adolescents to greater risks when they are removed from shelters to which they are being taken due to the lack of infrastructure of the Mexican State to house them; or with respect to detention of children and adolescents while they await the resolution of their migratory status, now in offices inside airports rather than in migratory stations.¹⁶⁹

In the case of the United States, the new efforts are characterized as very dual. On the one hand, the administration of Joe Biden indicated that efforts would be made to ensure the reunification of families separated in previous years, particularly during the administration of Donald Trump.¹⁷⁰ However, on the other hand, children and adolescents continue to be apprehended, detained and expelled under the pretext that they are a threat to the health of the American people.¹⁷¹ This situation could continue, since the Mexican government has made legislative changes to protect foreign children and adolescents arriving in its territory and, therefore, the U.S. administration could be considered exempt from this responsibility.¹⁷²

In this context, civil society organizations continue to call on the governments of the United States and Mexico to build regional migration and asylum policies focused on the protection of migrants in need of international protection,¹⁷³ and advocate for the implementation of the following recommendations.

To the U.S. government:

Withdraw the Center for Disease Control (CDC) order and the final decision of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under Title 42, and withdraw the removals of asylum seekers carried out under both instruments.

Improve the training of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and oversee its assessment of migrant children and adolescents from Mexico, integrating specialists in their protection into the process.

Order CBP personnel to stop turning away asylum-seeking children at U.S.-Mexico border ports of entry and to facilitate their access to asylum procedures.

Expedite the processing of asylum applications of unaccompanied children and adolescents, regardless of their nationality.

Facilitate the proper access of children and adolescents to asylum procedures at the U.S.-Mexico border, so that they can be reunited with their families and/or caregivers in the United States.

Oversee DHS agencies to stop the expulsions of asylum-seeking children at U.S. ports of entry and the unlawful returns of unaccompanied Mexican children by CBP, without legally required hazard and harm assessments in all cases.

Eliminate the border country provision of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA), which contravenes international standards for the protection of children and asylum seekers.

Eliminate Title 42 expulsions and internment to the United States of the population that was subject to the "Stay in Mexico" Protocol.

Reform temporary labor programs to eliminate cheap labor practices and precarious working conditions, and support the safe integration of returned migrants.

To the government of Mexico:

Order the Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB) and its agencies to adopt corrective measures to address the human rights violations identified in its Report.

Publicly affirming that children and adolescents do not accompany - and are not accompanied by - children and adolescents.

The right to seek and receive asylum from persecution and human rights violations, and to ensure access to asylum procedures.

Facilitate access to the asylum procedure and prevent unnecessary repatriation of unaccompanied migrant children seeking asylum at Mexico's northern and southern borders.

Facilitate the minor's unimpeded access to asylum proceedings at the U.S.-Mexico border so that he or she can be reunited with family members and/or caregivers in the United States.

Refrain from detaining unaccompanied migrant children in closed shelters and preventing them from accessing asylum procedures at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Review the achievements and failures of the current processes for the protection of children and adolescents and systems for determining the best interests of unaccompanied migrant children, in order to avoid more cases of refoulement.

Increase the recruitment, funding and training of child protection specialists in the DIF and the Subprocuraduradurías, to ensure that unaccompanied children in need of international protection are received and treated in accordance with human rights, and in line with the UNHCR Guidelines for the Determination and Assessment of the Best Interests of the Child.

Increase funding for the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) to expand its presence on Mexico's northern and southern borders and to improve its operational capacity.

Guarantee access to justice for migrant victims of crime.

Strengthen national self-determination to decide and implement its own migration policy.

Implement emergency health and international protection protocols for migrant and displaced children and adolescents.

Take measures to prevent and resolve crimes committed against migrant and displaced children and adolescents.

Assuming leadership in the creation of a Me-

The aim of this project is to promote a transnational mechanism for the comprehensive protection of migrant and displaced children and adolescents so that the authorities responsible for children in Mexico and their counterparts can determine international protection measures on a case-by-case basis.

The following are mentioned with respect to Mexican children and adolescents:

Strengthen the State through democratic governance, citizenship building and prioritizing the best interests of children.

Create institutional mechanisms for citizen participation from childhood, starting in schools.

Strengthen the public health system and community prevention.

To reduce the impact of the food crisis and stimulate a return to a healthy diet.

Reorient the attention and containment of Covid-19 to the syndemic approach based on human rights and the global nature of the pandemic.

Increase investment of public spending to reduce the negative impact of the pandemic.

Responses from civil society organizations and international organizations

The participation of civil society organizations and international agencies in pointing out the vulnerabilities and risks that children and adolescents face during the migration and displacement process, as well as the protection needs that require an effective, efficient and coordinated response with government authorities, has been a constant, especially since the first decade of the 21st century.¹⁷⁴

Shelters and migrant homes throughout the country are the places that have received children and adolescents, providing immediate humanitarian response in areas such as physical and mental health, education in emergencies, leisure time occupation, socio-cultural integration, housing and food, among others.¹⁷⁵

On the other hand, various organizations have issued recommendations and proposals for protocols for the care of children and adolescents which, despite having different perspectives, all converge in the urgent need to guarantee protection and access to rights.¹⁷⁶

In the case of international organizations, it is also important to coordinate with government authorities to strengthen their capacity to care for migrant and displaced children and adolescents.¹⁷⁷

The latter has been carried out through the strengthening of protection systems to improve alternative care options, improving the reception capacities of families with children, the mental health and psychosocial support response, and the prevention of violence against children, ensuring gender-sensitive care services. In addition, the capacities of the Offices of the Attorney General for Protection have been strengthened in best interest procedures, providing advice and support for the management of cases involving refugee and migrant children and adolescents; and collaborating with federal and state governments, as well as coordinating with institutions such as DIF, SIPINNA, CO-MAR, INM and various civil society organizations.¹⁷⁸

Finally, in broader terms regarding Mexican children, UNICEF proposed the construction of indexes of Mexican children's rights in 2004, with the objective of having a clear parameter of public policy efforts with respect to this population.



PANAMA

PANAMA

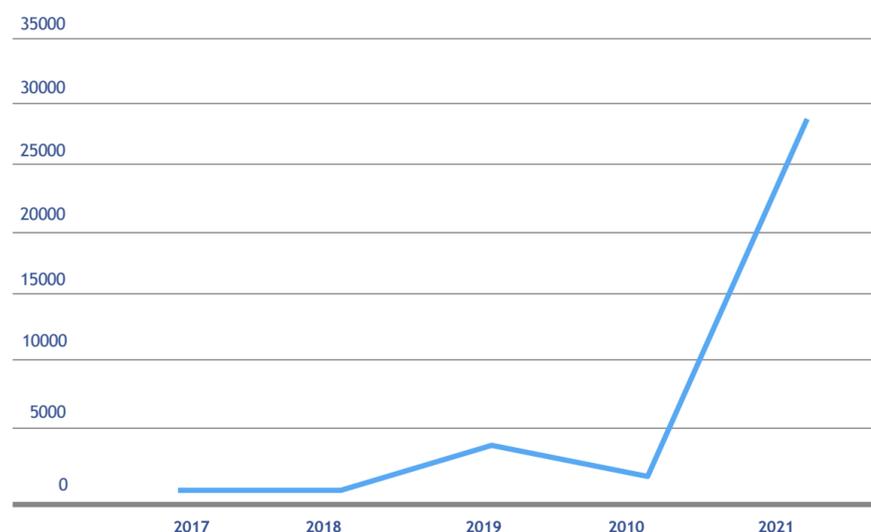
According to the latest data published in 2019 by the United Nations system, 185,072 migrants and refugees reside in the country, representing 4.39% of the total population. ¹⁷⁹ Regarding the origin of this population, it is estimated that in 2021 there are around 128,000 Venezuelan migrants and refugees.

The economic impact of Covid-19 has deteriorated the living conditions of this population. Their prospects for integration have diminished and their increasing vulnerability has put additional pressure on limited public services.

The institutional response in this regard has generated good practices, but also contradictions: on the one hand, it has taken into consideration the migrant and refugee population in the institutional responses to prevent the spread of the pandemic and has partially included this population in the governmental social assistance plans and in the access to some services, but, nevertheless, some obstacles related to the migratory categories, the lack of documentation, the limitations of mobility during quarantine and/or the limited understanding of the rights of the applicants of the pandemic have been experienced, such as the lack of documentation, the lack of access to services, and the lack of a clear understanding of the rights of the migrant and refugee population. ¹⁸⁰

On the other hand, the country is part of the mixed movements in the region towards Mexico and the United States. In this regard, the number of children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility that crossed the Dominican jungle has multiplied approximately 15 times in the last four years. It is estimated that 29,524 children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility (22% of the total number of mixed movements) crossed this border in 2021. Some 77.7% of this migratory flow was concentrated between July and October. ¹⁸¹

Children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility in transit through the Darién (2017 -2021).



Graph based on press releases from [UNICEF](#) and the [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#).

Children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility in transit through the Darien in 2021

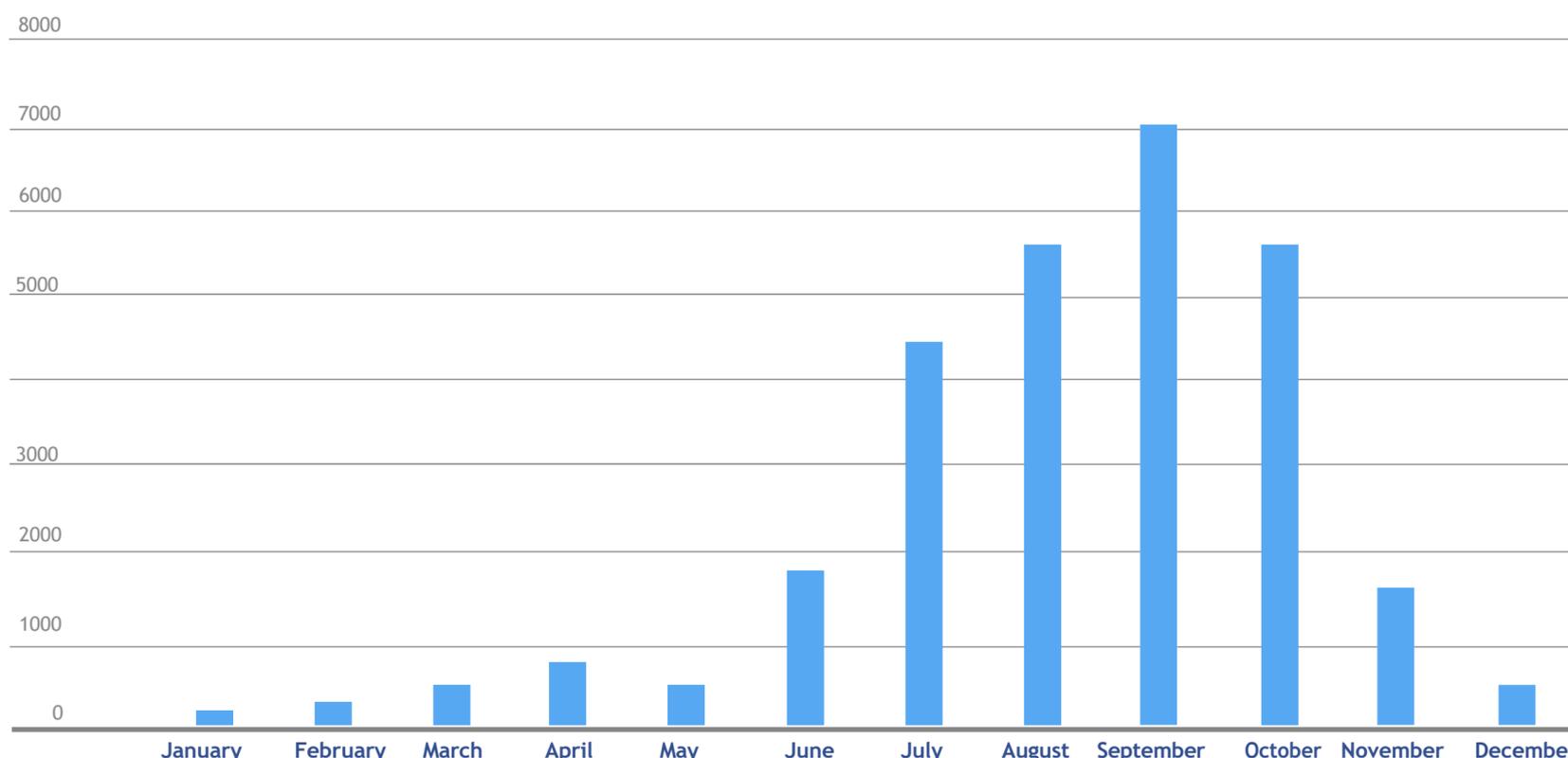


Chart based on official data published by the [National Immigration Service](#).

Persons in a situation of human mobility across the border with Colombia according to gender and age between January and December 2021.

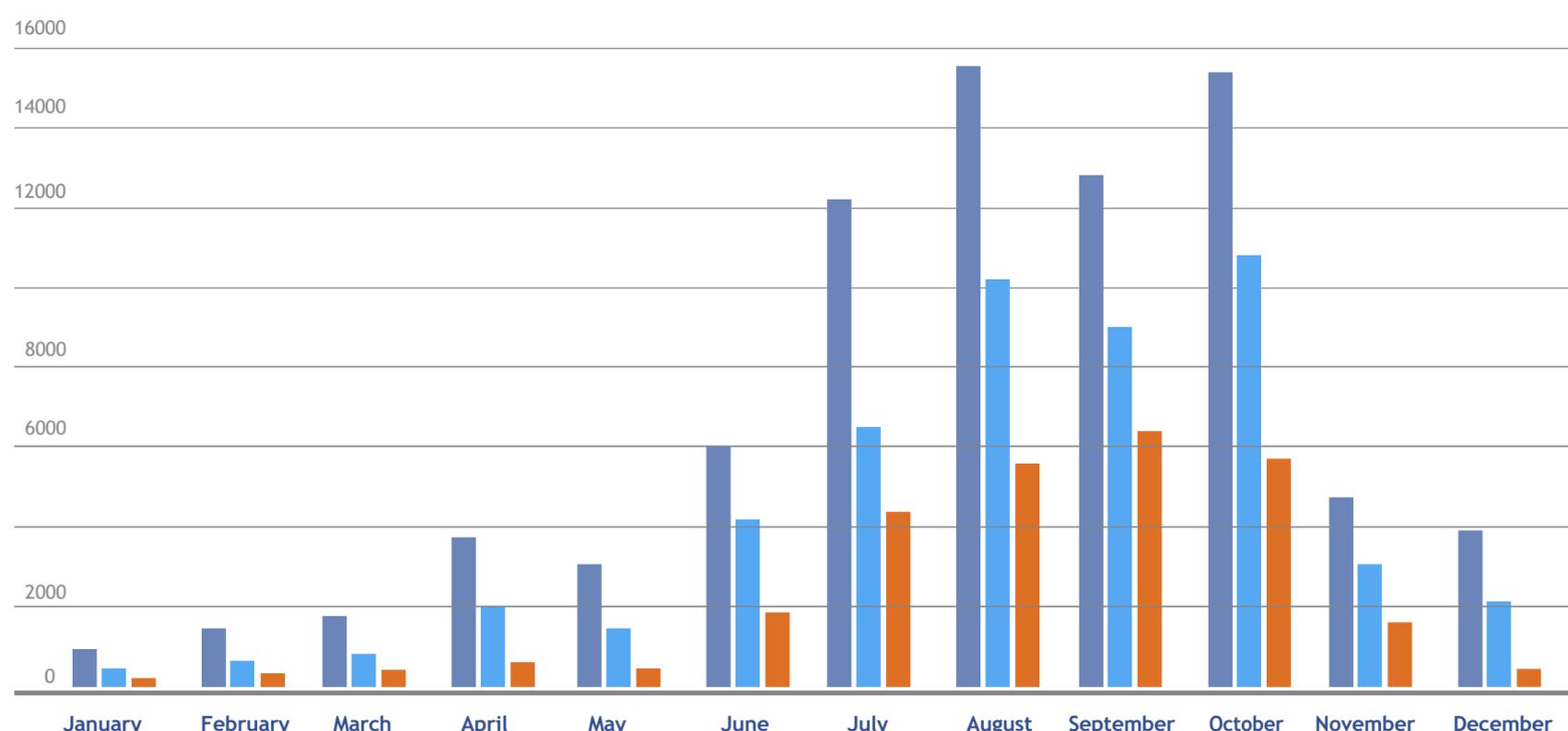


Chart based on official data published by the [National Immigration Service](#).

Risks of protection of the flow of children and adolescents in human mobility situation in transit through the Darien.

In recent years, the Darien Gap has become a common transit point for refugees and migrants seeking to reach the United States and Mexico. In the month of August 2021 alone, as many as 25,361 people crossed this route compared to the 30,000 people who crossed this point in all of 2016.¹⁸² From January to September of this year 18,935 children and adolescents have crossed the Darién jungle, tripling the cumulative records of the last five years. More than 1 in 5 people crossing the Colombia-Panama border are children, and half of them are under the age of five.¹⁸³

According to Panamanian authorities, the mixed movements from Colombia are composed of more than 40 nationalities, the vast majority of which are Haitian and Cuban, but there are also people from Venezuela and, to a lesser extent, Angola, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Nigeria, Pakistan and Uzbekistan. Part of this population left their countries several years ago to start a new life in South America. However, socio-economic inequalities, coupled with stigma, discrimination and the impact of Covid-19 led to a deterioration in their living conditions and their access to basic services such as water, sanitation, food, housing, employment, etc., and to a decline in their access to basic services.

and health, including access to vaccines against Covid-19.¹⁸⁴

Children and adolescents crossing the Darien route suffer various protection risks, including risks related to gender-based violence, human trafficking, and other types of violence (assaults, kidnappings or even disappearances).

The Ombudsman's Office of Panama, in the framework of the recent bilateral agreement with Colombia to regulate the number of entries into Panamanian territory (650 persons in August and 500 persons in September 2021), issued a series of recommendations as a result of a humanitarian visit to the municipality of Capurganá in the municipality of Acandí, department of Chocó, including a call to redouble inter-institutional efforts in favor of the comprehensive protection of the rights of migrant and refugee children and adolescents. It also calls for the States involved to work together with international organizations and communities to guarantee the human rights of persons in a situation of human mobility.¹⁸⁵

It should be recalled that according to the National Migration Service, between January 2019 and August 2021, approximately 50 unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents crossed the Darien border. **The Secretariat of Childhood, Adolescence and Family, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is responsible for processing these individuals to identify whether they have relatives in their cities of origin in order to proceed with family reunification.** Sometimes their caregivers or legal guardians die along the way or they start the journey alone. A phenomenon detected in the Darién is the arrival of unaccompanied children prior to the arrival of their fathers and/or mothers, who usually arrive two days later. While this situation is clearly not as serious as a permanent separation, it can expose children and adolescents to higher risk situations as they are unprotected from legal guardians. Some organized crime groups are encouraging the population in a situation of human mobility with false promises, going so far as to offer them up to US\$2,500 to reach Colombia and from there cross Central America to reach the United States. ¹⁸⁶

Responses from civil society organizations and international organizations

The number of children and adolescents crossing the Darien border increased 15-fold in the last four years compared to 2017, representing more than 20% of the total migratory flow that crossed this point in 2019. Precisely, in 2020 and in the first months of 2021 both UNICEF and Médicos Sans Frontières (MSF) have highlighted the increase in cases of sexual violence towards NNA. UNICEF, the International Federation of the Red Cross, the Panamanian Red Cross and RET Americas have provided humanitarian assistance to this population group and have expanded their aid programs on the ground to respond to the growing needs of children and families in transit through the country. ¹⁸⁷

In addition, SOS Children's Villages signed an agreement with UNICEF and the Secretariat of Adolescence, Childhood and Family (SENNIAF) last year to implement a Transitory Shelter whose objective is to provide protection and psychosocial care to children and adolescents in a situation of human mobility who arrive at the Migratory Reception Stations (ERM) of Bajo Chiquito, in the Emberá Wounaan Comarca, and Lajas Blancas, located in the Darién. Their relatives, in most cases, are left behind on the Darién crossing and arrive days later at the ERMs. Others, however, die en route. Between June 2021 and January 2022, according to official data, approximately 127 children and adolescents passed through the Transitory Shelter. ¹⁸⁸

The average stay is three to four days, although in exceptional cases it may take up to three weeks. In the case of separated or unaccompanied minors, SENNIAF issues a protection measure to guarantee their life and rights, in addition to requesting support from embassies and consulates and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to refer these persons to a relative in their country of origin and, if possible, to return them to their family, i.e., to hand them over to them. However, when there is no record of a family member of the minor, authorization is requested from the Court for Children and Adolescents so that the child can opt for another alternative care option, preferably a family type (foster care) and, as a last resort, an institutional alternative. In a forthcoming second phase of the project, in view of the foreseeable increase in the number of people in a situation of human mobility through the Darién, the aim is for families in this province, after undergoing a rigorous evaluation and supervision, to become foster families, so that they can also provide protection to this profile of migrant population. ¹⁸⁹

The Darien Local Human Mobility Group organizes monthly meetings between representatives of MSF, the International Federation of the Red Cross, UNICEF, RET Americas, IOM, HIAS, UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). Its objective is to strengthen inter-agency work on human mobility at this border and avoid duplication. ¹⁹⁰

UNICEF, the International Federation of the Red Cross, the Panamanian Red Cross, the Norwegian Refugee Council and RET Americas have provided humanitarian assistance to this population group and have expanded their aid programs on the ground to respond to the growing needs of children and families in transit through the country. ¹⁹¹

Finally, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is implementing a complementary nutritional meal for children aged 0 to 5 years and nursing and pregnant mothers at the Migrant Reception Station (ERM) of San Vicente in Darien after identifying a lack of differentiated food in the ERM and conditions of child malnutrition identified by the Panamanian Red Cross, Unicef and Doctors Without Borders.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 1 The systematic violation of the rights to health, education, a dignified life and a life free of violence in the northern countries of Central America and Mexico is a determining factor in the increasing participation of children and adolescents in the cycles of forced displacement in recent years.
- 2 The lack of socioeconomic opportunities and high levels of violence are both cause and effect of forced recruitment of children in the northern countries of Central America and Mexico.
- 3 In most cases, national child and adolescent protection systems are not adapted to their needs, nor do they address the structural causes of their displacement, perpetuating this mobility. In this regard, humanitarian organizations have promoted the revision of existing care protocols to include variables such as age differences.
- 4 Children and adolescents face multiple protection risks during their migration route to the United States and Mexico. Ensuring access to protection services along the route is essential to reduce risks.
- 5 Governments should work in an articulated and systematic manner to strengthen detection, detention and investigation systems against national and transnational organized networks involved in trafficking, smuggling and illicit activities that put the lives of migrants at risk and that especially affect children and adolescents.
- 6 Inter-institutional work between the authorities of transit countries is essential to design and implement a comprehensive and effective regional response that guarantees dignified and safe mobility and avoids the detention of children and adolescents through transnational protection mechanisms and alternative care models.
- 7 There is insufficient information available to assess the impact and results of the Biden administration's immigration policy. Some policies from previous administrations are maintained, such as the externalization of borders and protection mechanisms. However, some legislative changes have been announced to protect from deportation thousands of migrants who arrived in the United States as children and adolescents, which should be followed up to evaluate their results.

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