



# GIRLS ON THE MOVE IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND VENEZUELA



There are approximately

**79,5 million**  
forcibly displaced people  
in the world

**31 million**  
of them are children

Over **5.1 million** Venezuelans have left their country to date. Individuals from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador comprise the majority of migrants bound for the United States and Mexico. **Eighty percent** of the children detained at the US-Mexican border came from these three countries. Gendered patterns emerged in the last five years within child migration.

As part of the global series "Girls on the move" initiated by Save the Children Sweden, two studies were carried out in Latin America and the Caribbean during 2019, one for the Central American migration context and the other for the Venezuelan migration context. The studies aim to address the gaps in the current literature and programmatic approaches for girls at different stages of migration and displacement.

The primary purpose of this report is to recommend evidence-based strategies to improve the relevance and effectiveness of field interventions that target development outcomes for girls on the move in the region.

The studies will contribute to a more nuanced understanding within and beyond Save the Children of how gender impacts experiences and outcomes for children in migration and displacement.

The studies considered a participatory consultation methodology, listening to, and learning from, the girls themselves. To this end, a total of **34 girls** were consulted directly, in addition to Save the Children staff in Colombia and Mexico, as well as different authorities and social organizations that serve the migrant population.

This study pretends to give the opportunity to practitioners to learn from girls and adolescents on the move, as they express their challenges, needs and expectations, based on their lived experience. Save the Children is committed to improving its programming for girls on the move based on the recommendations that result from the studies.

## MAIN FINDINGS

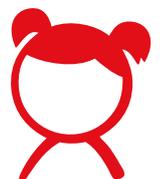


### Common risks and needs among girls and adolescents on the move are made visible:

- They start their migratory process without knowing the magnitude of the journey.
- They are more vulnerable to physical violence, sexual violence, sexual or commercial exploitation, or detentions.
- They suffer from anxiety, insomnia and other mental health disorders.
- In the case of the Venezuelan context, xenophobia is incorporated as an obstacle for full social integration, and in the case of Central America, the stigmatization of the migrant.

### There are differentiated risks according to the migratory stage that affect especially girls and adolescents:

- During transit, risks such as gender-based violence, trafficking and smuggling, detention, health problems (anxiety, insomnia...) or hunger can be identified.
- At destination the risks are associated with stigmatization, xenophobia, lack of access to services, exchange of sex for basic needs and resources, or limited participation in community or peer spaces.



### Girls and adolescent women employ a variety of strategies to protect themselves and to cope with the challenges:



- Migration works as a self-protection strategy in the first place.
- *Coyotes* or other transportation services, small group or caravan travel, cross-dressing (or wearing clothing not usually associated with your gender), contraceptive use, or finding a romantic male partner before or during the trip, all emerge as harm reduction strategies.
- Developing friendships during the trip or being accompanied by groups of trusted people/peers, is highly valued by girls and adolescents as a protection strategy during the journey.



## CONCLUSIONS

- **Diverse groups of girls and adolescents are displaced in** the region. Country of origin, language, age, ethnicity, race, and the intersection of various aspects of identity and power influence how girls experience their journey. Girls bring a diverse set of needs, abilities, and support networks. Policies and programs may not reach girls or effectively support them if they do not take this diversity into account.
- **Girls and adolescents migrate due to many reasons**, including pregnancy. They travel for complex and interrelated reasons. These reasons complicate any single account of their migration and challenge the comprehensiveness of care at each stage of migration.
- **The migration context is changing rapidly**, and both migrants and organizations that deal with migration flows must take the time to understand the changing conditions, as the risks and protection needs of girls change with them. This requires agility, investment in information sharing and coordination, and responsiveness to human rights violations.

## PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS



Invest more in girls and adolescents on the move from origin to destination.

Include care and attention services for girls and boys, which promote the participation of adolescent mothers.



Provide safe psycho-social support spaces.

Develop a learning program focused on girls and adolescents.



Strengthen partner organizations and support the government in providing girl-friendly sexual and reproductive health services.

Advocate for the inclusion of a gender and children's perspective in migration policies.



And, above all, listen to and learn from girls and adolescents in order to improve programming and decision-making in an individualized and focused manner.

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