



Preventing Irregular Child Migration in Central America

PICMCA

Funded by the Government of Canada



Between 2013-2016 over 200,000 unaccompanied migrant children were apprehended by the US border police with a 50% increase in 2016 in comparison to the previous year¹. Children migrate to escape violence at home, to leave behind unemployment and lack of opportunities and in search of a better life.

The complex push and pull factors driving child and family migration from Central America to the United States have changed little since the 2014 crisis. Despite some fluctuation in arrival numbers, recent trends suggest the characteristics of an enduring phenomenon. In particular, all three Northern Triangle countries continue to experience high levels of violence, food insecurity, and poverty, the primary push factors contributing to migration outflows from the region.

El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have for several years accounted for the highest murder rates in the world, with the deaths frequently connected to drug trafficking and organized crime, often affecting women and children.

Economic conditions also remain an important push factor. In 2016, after 2 years of persistent drought some 3.5 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance with 1.6 million moderately or severely food insecure in the hard-hit countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras².

The region's political instability has further limited the ability of government to respond to governance challenges across the board, whether related to drought, poverty, or violence – former and current presidents from the region have been charged with serious corruption crimes recently.

Considering this panorama of high incidence of violence, poverty, food insecurity, and political turmoil, unaccompanied children and families alike can be expected to continue to try to make their way to the United States, aided by smuggling networks that nimbly adapt to enforcement efforts, both in Mexico and the United States.

¹ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/ly-2016/>
² <http://reliefweb.int/disaster/dr-2014-000132-hnd>



PICMCA/CONFIO seeks to improve the well-being of children and youth from 6 to 24 years old in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Mexico, addressing some of the root causes of irregular migration.

Christian Children's Fund of Canada (CCFC) is leading a CAD \$15.2M regional project in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua, designed to improve the well-being of children and youth who are at risk of irregular migration. The Government of Canada is contributing **CAD \$12.6 million** to the four-year project. The *Preventing Irregular Child Migration in Central America Project (PICMA)* (referred to in Spanish as the "CONFIO" project) addresses the root causes that fuel irregular migration— from high levels of crime and violence, limited employment and educational opportunities, to social exclusion and a lack of information on the inherent dangers of migrating without following the normal immigration procedures. The project focuses on children and youth at risk of irregular migration considering their increased vulnerability to human rights abuses, including discrimination, abuse, extortion, kidnapping, human trafficking, and sexual violence. For this project, CCFC is partnering with two non-governmental organizations: ChildFund International-USA and Educo-Spain.

To achieve its objective, the project's approach will be to address the root causes which have been identified by migration experts as leading to irregular child migration from and within the region, and will specifically focus on the following three root causes:

- I. **High levels of crime and violence** (including gang violence, intra-family violence, and school violence), which are a result of a combination of external factors such as drug trafficking, as well as internal factors such as socio-economic and governance conditions;
- II. **Limited employment and educational opportunities** for at-risk youth, which often results in their social exclusion and marginalization; and
- III. **A lack of awareness of the dangers of irregular child migration**, on the part of children and youth and their families.



Prevention of violence against children

Improve delivery of child protection services and violence prevention programs for children and youth at the community level.



Training, entrepreneurship and skills for life

Provide access for at-risk youth to demand-driven training in vocational technical skills, small enterprise development, and life skills.



Information on the risk of irregular migration

Improve youth leadership to inform and influence regional and national decision-makers and the national public on the risks and root causes of irregular child migration root.