

## Leaving is living

The impact of family, the economy and violence on migrant children from El Salvador

Alfonso Álvarez, Silvana Audia Comandari, Marielos Burgos and Miguel Artiga,  
World Vision El Salvador

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past 40 years, both external and internal migration have been constant in the history of El Salvador. Many studies have been carried out on the issue of migration, however, never from the perspective of children. World Vision, a child-focused humanitarian aid organization, conducted migration studies in 2014 and 2019 – interviewing children directly as well as their caregivers – to gain a deeper understanding into the phenomenon of migration in El Salvador during the most recent migratory events: the mass migration of children in 2014 and the caravans in 2018. The studies have led to the development of recommendations for both government and non-government organizations that aim to prevent human rights violations and protect children before, during and after migration.

Despite migration being a common trend in El Salvador's and the rest of the Northern Triangle's (El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala) recent history, there has been limited first-hand evidence from children about their motivations and experiences while in irregular and regular migration processes. In some cases, the children are migrating alone and are the ones who suffer the most abuse and trauma. The lack of support and mechanisms that provide assistance make it a dangerous solution. Nevertheless, from their parents' and caregivers' perspective, leaving is still the best option. To stay in their communities means very few economic opportunities and little to no safety, and, in many cases, migration is the only solution for family reunification. The findings of World Vision's studies outline the social and economic factors that influence children's and caregivers' decisions to migrate. The findings also provide empirical evidence of the nature of children's lived experiences along migratory routes, while highlighting the crucial role of families and migrant shelters throughout migration processes.

To generate these findings, World Vision conducted surveys and interviews, ultimately reaching over 2,000 children and 400 primary caretakers through both studies. Participants were selected from World Vision's sponsorship programs located in 27 municipalities, of which 25 had some of the highest migration indexes for children in El Salvador. Using the information obtained from these studies, World Vision identified and analyzed the role different factors such as age, family status, education and employment played in children's and caregivers' main motivation and ultimate decision to migrate.

Based on the findings of these studies, World Vision identified that Salvadorian children were principally motivated to migrate for three main reasons: (1) family reunification (2) economic exclusion and/or opportunities elsewhere, and (3) social violence occurring in their community. This paper intends to provide evidence of these motivations – as expressed by children and primary caretakers in El Salvador – to migrate to other parts of El Salvador or to another country.

Although the findings have been structured in a conclusive manner, the motivations to migrate and the various factors that influence them are not unique and mutually exclusive. Rather, these motivations are largely interconnected and come into play simultaneously. Therefore, it is imperative that the Salvadorian state, local governments and civil society organizations understand the complexity of migration processes involving children. In this way, this paper recommends that multi-level strategies that articulate the roles of each of these actors be established to ensure that the various dimensions of migration are addressed in an effective manner. The goal of these efforts is to create long-term solutions that lead to transformation in the contexts where children live and interact in El Salvador and throughout the rest of the Northern Triangle of Central America.

## CONTEXT

### History of Migration in El Salvador

El Salvador's recent history is marked by the impact of different types of migration. Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Salvadorians have chosen to migrate as a direct result of the socioeconomic and political conditions shaping their local contexts. Since 1980, there have been three crucial migratory waves from El Salvador in response to specific socioeconomic, political and environmental circumstances.

The first large-scale Salvadorian diaspora emerged during the country's civil war (1980–1992). During this period, thousands were forced to migrate, both internally and externally, due to generalized insecurity, a sharp economic decline and political instability. Most Salvadorians migrating externally did so irregularly with the aim of reaching the United States. As a result, the Salvadorian population in the U.S. grew from 94,400 in 1980 to 465,400 in 1990 (Davy, 2006; Gammage, 2007; Menjívar, 2000), and has continued increasing since. By 2012, Salvadorians were the second largest unauthorized Latin population in the U.S. behind Mexicans (Passel and Cohn, 2014).

The second migratory wave emerged during the post-war decade (1993–2003) as a result of stagnant economic growth, natural disasters (e.g., Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and the 2001 earthquakes) and the escalation of social violence (PNUD 2005; Davy 2006; Mahler and Ugrina 2006; Pederzini et al. 2015). The escalation of social violence was largely attributed to criminal groups known as *maras* or gangs. These gangs were themselves a product of the first migratory wave, as they had been formed by Salvadorians in the U.S. who were deported back to El Salvador in the post-war era. To confront this context, the governments of two consecutive Salvadorian presidencies between 2004 and 2012 triggered "iron fist" security policies, with large-scale police deployments and repressive military strategies that led to an unprecedented increase in homicides and incarceration rates (Muggah, 2017).

Finally, the third migratory wave surged in 2014 and it continues today. In 2014, the U.S. Border Patrol apprehended a total of 69,000 children and 68,000 families from Central America (Chishti and Hipsman, 2016). Specifically, there were 16,404 unaccompanied children from El Salvador (U.S. Custom and Border Protection, 2015). This situation was driven by a series of structural elements related to the presence of organized criminal groups, rampant social violence and lack of economic and education opportunities in El Salvador. Within this situation, U.S. President Barack Obama declared a humanitarian crisis at the U.S. border due to the significant number of unaccompanied child arrivals (mostly from Central America) and the health, safety and well-being condition of those children (Office of the Press Secretary, 2014). The U.S. did not have the sufficient resources and response capacity to deal with this emergency, requiring the reception of humanitarian aid from U.S congress and donor countries.

### The Impact of Violence and a Stagnant Economy

Over the last decade, El Salvador has experienced unprecedented levels of violence throughout the country. *Maras* or gangs retain stark influence, creating and exacerbating a generalized context of violence mainly through homicides and extortion. There are approximately 60,000 gang members in El Salvador and their presence is widely felt by individuals and communities throughout nearly the entire Salvadorian territory. Of El Salvador's 262 municipalities, 247 have reported significant gang presence that threatens families, violates numerous rights and disrupts community dynamics related to education, recreation and public spaces (Martínez, Lemus, Martínez and Sontag, 2016). Homicides, in particular, have been rampant in recent years. There were more than 15,000 homicides between 2014 and 2016, creating record high homicide rates of 103 and 82 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2015 and 2016, respectively. The demographic impact of homicides has been extremely disproportionate, with 40% of victims aged 15 to 24, and 90% male (CNN Español, 2017).

Simultaneously, El Salvador has suffered stagnant economic growth over the last decade. From 2008 to 2018, El Salvador experienced the lowest economic growth in Central America. While Central American countries had GDP growth between 36% and 39% during that period, while El Salvador's GDP grew by only 22% (FUSADES, 2019). Remittances from Salvadorians abroad are of significant value to the Salvadorian economy and have increased in total amount over the last decade. According to data from the Central Reserve Bank of El Salvador, in 2010 remittances amounted to \$3.4 billion USD and in 2017 had increased to \$5.1 billion USD, which is an equivalent of approximately 20% of the total GDP (FUSADES, 2019).

The country also faces a delicate fiscal situation, given that there is a fiscal deficit of 2.8% and a public debt equivalent 61% of the GDP (World Bank, 2017). This economic context has exacerbated the lack of economic opportunities available to adults. According to economic analysis carried out by the Salvadorian Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES in Spanish) in 2019, the Salvadorian economy has not been able to absorb more than 20% of the population that has entered the national labor force in the last five years (FUSADES, 2019). Furthermore, the majority of the economically active population is employed by the informal sector in jobs such as housekeeping and street vending. This type of employment offers no forms of social security, such as health insurance, future access to pension funds and regulated labor rights. FUSADES also highlighted that in 2018, 72% of the national economically active population was informally employed. One of the most affected age groups within the economically active population are between ages 15 and 29, of which 74% are part of the informal sector (FUSADES, 2018)



*WV El Salvador Staff interacting with children in El Buen Pastor Shelter, Tapachula*

### The Upsurge of Migrant Caravans

Central American irregular migrants have traditionally relied on established migration networks operated by guides known as **coyotes**. Under different price schemes, these networks transport groups of migrants irregularly through Central America and Mexico. However, the coyotes keep these networks mostly out of sight and do not guarantee migrants any level of protection against organized criminal groups who might threaten, extort or exploit them along the journey. In 2018, as a reaction to the deteriorating social and economic context in the Northern Triangle countries, migrants began to seek protection in numbers, advocate for better living conditions in their home communities and rally international support by organizing themselves in large-scale migrant caravans.

Between October and December 2018, up to six migrant caravans mobilizing a total of approximately 10,000 people were organized in the Northern Triangle countries with the aim of reaching the U.S. border. The caravans were mainly comprised of migrants from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, but Mexican migrants also joined along the way. According to Mexico's Ministry of the Interior, between January and March 2019, an unprecedented number of people crossed the country irregularly heading towards the U.S. – more than 300,000 people. And by April 2019, approximately eight migrant caravans had been identified. According to estimates made by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), around 2,300 children participated in these caravans (UNICEF, 2018).

In the face of this regional migration crisis, the lack of integration of the protocols and joint actions of the different countries of Central America could be observed. Therefore, the low capacity of regional entities to ensure the rights of migrants during the crisis, the journey and the return to their countries was evidenced. During this period, some regional programs such as Mesoamerica and Caribbean migration program and others were created to address the problem, generating regional governance mechanisms, as well as strengthening alliances and bilateral cooperation on migration with the support of different

international organizations. Likewise, there was an effort of communication development strategies at the regional level and in each country to inform and prevent irregular migration. However, efforts for Central American integration on these issues are still insufficient.

### Pacific Route and Its Importance in the Investigation

The Pacific Route has been the most traveled route for Central American migrants over the last 10 years, and this only increased with the caravans. The journey begins in Mexico City, it passes through states in the center of the country and continues through Jalisco, Sinaloa and Sonora to Mexicali, Baja California, bordering California. This has been the preferred route because it is considered the least dangerous option, since it avoids going through cities with high crime rates or that are controlled by drug cartels. However, migrants still face many risks including assaults, extreme changes in climate, extortion and sexual abuse (mainly women and children), among others (Ureste, 2014).

## WORLD VISION'S MIGRATION STUDIES

### Previous Studies

As part of its organizational mandate and programmatic approach, World Vision focuses on promoting the well-being of children. Given the context of generalized social violence, lack of economic opportunities and violations of children's rights in El Salvador, World Vision carried out two migration studies to explore the principal motivations for migrating amongst children. The initial 2014 study, "Motivations for Migration in Children in 27 Municipalities of El Salvador," aimed to identify the principal causes that led to the migration of children registered in World Vision's sponsorship programs in these municipalities between July 2013 and June 2014 .

To better comprehend the relevant factors that affect migration, the 2014 study also sought to obtain further evidence of the social and economic nature of the migration processes undergone by children. This study would complete the following objectives: create profiles of migrant children and get more in-depth information about their travel motivations and the conditions during their journey. Information was primarily gathered from 577 surveys with caretakers of children who had migrated during the course of the study.

Four years later in 2018, there was another significant surge in migration of children, mainly through the Central American migrant caravans. This new migratory crisis prompted World Vision to carry out a follow-up migratory study in El Salvador and Mexico in between 2018 and early 2019. This time, the study directly targeted children as well as primary caretakers as sources. To further understand the issues facing migrant children, World Vision also focused on three other areas: (1) determining the root causes that motivate girls and boys to migrate involuntary or voluntary from their home communities, (2) identifying and understanding the conditions necessary to strengthen the children's sense of belonging in their home communities, and (3) highlighting the child-rights violations they suffer during irregular and regular migration processes that were known but were lacking evidence. The goal of this research was to gather data and evidence within World Vision's programs in El Salvador from January to December 2018 and a tour through the Pacific route in early 2019. As a result of this data and evidence, the study recommends a series of strategies to intervene at the municipality level on the phenomenon of the migration of Salvadorian children.

### Length and Scope of Investigation

The latest investigation was carried out between 2018 and 2019 in El Salvador and Mexico. Across 27 municipalities supported by the organization's long-term area programs in El Salvador, World Vision surveyed 111 girls and boys who remained in their communities as well as 423 parents or caregivers of children who had migrated from those communities in 2018. World Vision El Salvador's technical staff,

along with an external consultant and members of the communications team of the Elim Church, then carried out a field study in several Mexican cities in cooperation with World Vision Mexico and World Vision Honduras, during which girls and boys as well as shelter directors and pro-migration activists were interviewed. The study focused on the “Pacific Route”, one of the most regularly used routes by Salvadorian migrant children heading to the U.S. The study began in Tapachula, a city at the Mexico-Guatemala border, then moved to Mexico City, and concluded in Tijuana along the Mexico-U.S. border.

In April 2019, a team of World Vision researchers from El Salvador (4), Honduras (2) and Mexico (3), along with two members of the ELIMTV television station, explored some of the most important cities on the route: Tapachula, Mexico City and Tijuana. The aim was to observe the conditions migrants, especially children, face on the journey. Additionally, the team gathered videos, images and testimonies to prepare a documentary that evidences the risks and violations endured. The tour illuminated the reality of the migration experience, including the lack of state protection mechanisms, for migrants generally, but child migrants in particular, as they lack the emotional and social tools to understand and manage the adverse experiences they face. It also provided the World Vision El Salvador team with an opportunity to gather relevant information for analysis and the triangulation of data collected in El Salvador.

## Methodology

The research was carried out between January and April 2019 and used qualitative and quantitative techniques for the data analysis. The population of the study was 2,517 children identified from World Vision’s registry who left the country or migrated to another department, which is the equivalent term for state or province in El Salvador and participated in their programs. The main data collection techniques as mentioned previously are as follows:

- a) A survey with parents or caregivers of migrant children was conducted that included topics of social economic context, general information about their family member/s who migrated, certain details of the journey he or she went through and the motivations to leave.
- b) Surveys and focus groups took place with children who have not migrated, covering the topics of the community context, the perception of opportunities and support for their age groups, their family history related to migration, their opinions on their family relationships, and their interest in migrating or staying.
- c) In-depth interviews were conducted with migrant boys and girls from the Northern Triangle and Mexico found in 10 shelters. The purpose of these interviews was to learn from their social and family context and discover what they were told about migration. They were asked to describe their journey and about human rights throughout different topics such as sexual assault, food security, education and abandonment.
- d) Migrant shelters’ staff as well as pro-migration and human rights activists were interviewed to obtain information on the financial support, protocols for housing children, and organizational information about the shelters and their perspectives on the phenomenon of migration.



*WV El Salvador Staff interviewing children in El Buen Pastor Shelter, Tapachula*

World Vision used different inclusion and exclusion criteria during the study to determine who would be interviewed, surveyed and included in the research. Some of these inclusion criteria were: children who are or were a part of World Vision programs and children in the shelters from Guatemala, Honduras, and

El Salvador. Some of the exclusion criteria were: shelter representatives that were not specifically for the migrant population and human rights defenders in other areas not related to the rights of migrants.

Within this framework, the sample size for the surveys given to the mothers, fathers, caregivers or informants of girls and boys who migrated in 2018 was 432 (85 male and 347 female). Also, from the World Vision registry, 111 boys and girls were randomly chosen to survey and be the population sample size for children who had not migrated (52% were boys and 48% girls). Across the three Mexican cities that the World Vision team visited, a total of 17 girls, 30 boys and 10 shelter representatives were interviewed in the shelters. Lastly, one male and one female pro-migration activists were interviewed – one in Mexico City and one in Tijuana. A total of 600 people engaged in the research via different methodologies.

## RESULTS

### The Main Motivations for Migration

The data collected allowed World Vision to identify that the main motivations driving the decision for children to migrate regularly or irregularly are to reunify with family, to seek economic opportunities and to flee violence. These results are similar to those identified in the 2015 study. This scenario reflects that the conditions that caused migration then persist in their communities – conditions such as grandparents as caregivers of children after their parents migrated first, and the children’s desire to reunite.

Comparing the 2015 and the 2019 studies, we see that unaccompanied children are traveling to meet their parents in similar percentages: 79.1% in 2014 and 69.9% in 2018. Furthermore, there is evidence that the current migration of children who travel from El Salvador for reunification reasons is based on the existence of solid networks to migrate – in most cases the parents who have migrated pay for their children’s travel. By 2017, an estimated 2.3 million Salvadorans resided in the U.S., impacting the children’s decision on where to migrate (Noe-Bustamante, Flores & Shah, 2019).

On the other hand, economic motivations are based on the fact that employment opportunities for youth are limited in El Salvador. In general, economic activities in the area where the study was conducted are related to subsistence agriculture, where food grown is for the family’s consumption. The type of employment in the rural area is seasonal, there are many available laborers, and work is only given at the time of harvesting or preparing the land. The level of productivity is lower every year because of the land wear, and markets do not compensate for the effort made when it comes to selling the harvest. When conducting the focus group in El Salvador, many youths mentioned the “lack of opportunities”, “lack of permanent employment” and “[in the rural areas] there is no space to create new jobs” (World Vision, 2019 p 42).

The third largest motivation to migrate is the context of violence – more specifically the threats and recruitment of gangs and the growth of violence in almost all communities. Although the violence is not directly targeted at children, they do suffer the direct consequences, one of which is needing to flee for their safety. This is clear from an interview done in a shelter in Tapachula when a young girl told us, “I was raped. We [family] informed the police. When the police caught the rapist, he was incarcerated. But he hired some gang members to threaten us and remove the report against him. If we did not do this, they would rape me again. In that moment we decided to leave one night at midnight and go up north” (Migrant child, April 10, 2019, personal interview). This is one of the many stories told by children where they had to flee from the violence in El Salvador.

## Migrants' Experiences

As part of the investigations, the conversations and interviews with the people en route provided many important examples that reflect the main motivations to migrate and the risks in the journey.

One of the interviews from the research's database that reflects the reality of many is from Juan, a Salvadoran migrant, in a shelter in Mexico: "We left El Salvador at dawn on January 7 of this year (2019) – me, my wife, and my 7 children (4 minors). A month before they took me [gang members]..., about 7 of them pointed guns and rifles at me, and they threatened me saying that they knew which school my children were studying and that they would kill me and all of them if I did not pay them more rent". In El Salvador, it is very common for community members to be forced to pay gangs rent. Deciding not to do so is a death sentence. Those without the means to pay are often forced to flee out of the country or to temporarily live in a different area of the country where a different gang is in control for their survival to later migrate.

## Important Social Factors Identified

Two important social factors identified in the studies were key in shaping the migration process for children in El Salvador and the rest of the Northern Triangle of Central America. One factor is the first-wave migrant family social networks (e.g., family members, family friends) that regularly act as catalyzers for migration processes. These are people who have already migrated and now help children with coordination and the necessary financial and legal resources for family-oriented migration processes. The other social factor is faith-based migrant shelters that provide reception, legal and protection services to migrants along the migration routes in Mexico – one of the only reliable support networks for migrants during their journey. Based on the accounts of primary caretakers for migrant children during World Vision's initial 2014 study, World Vision El Salvador was able to recreate the migration processes experienced by those children through the information provided by their caregivers; however, the 2019 study provided first-hand evidence from interviews with the children on the move, as well as migrant shelter staff and pro-migration activists in Mexico. By visiting migrant shelters in three Mexican cities located along the "Pacific Route", World Vision directly engaged with children on the move to learn about their experiences and the rights violations they suffered along their journey.

## Internal Displacement in El Salvador

In some cases, in El Salvador, migration does not mean leaving the country. There is a significant number of Salvadorians moving internally in the country, and in many cases it's not voluntary, making it internal displacement instead of migration. From the people interviewed in the 2014 research who did this type of movement 21.1% said that the main motivation was the situation of violence they were living in. The research recognized that to leave their communities because of violence "is a protection mechanism used by children, adolescence, youth and their families to safeguard their lives against the threats of the gangs" (World Vision, 2014 p. 28).

A comparison between cross-border and internal migration determined that 98.6% of people that mobilize internally get to their destination, while 92% of the people attempting to migrate to other countries do so. Also, the financial resources used in internal migration processes are much lower (49 USD) compared to the cost to reach the US for example, with an approximate average cost of 5,993 USD (World Vision, 2014 p. 32). When people leave the country, it takes them on average 23 days to arrive, and when it's internal it takes on average 1.3 days. To understand the volume of internal displacement the following table provides additional information.

Table A: Destination of the migration per Conglomerate

	USA	Other country	Other department (internal)
Boys and girls (0-12 years old)	54.5%	9.1%	36.4%
Boys, girls, adolescence and youth	85.3%	1.1%	13.5%
Independent adolescence and youth	87.6%	2.7%	9.7%

Source: Motivos de migración de la Niñez y Juventud en 27 Municipios de El Salvador, 2014 (translated)

As shown in the table, the second most common type of migration is internal. Based on the information obtained from the study if children are not leaving for the United States, they are most likely moving to another department inside of El Salvador.

### Psychosocial Implications

Every migrant has to go through the different stages of the migratory transit (origin, transit and destination), it implies a series of dangers and risk factors that can generate and enhance physical and emotional vulnerabilities, especially for children, and even more so when they travel unaccompanied.

The study highlighted that at a younger age, children migrate regularly or irregularly as a result of the decision taken by their parents or caregivers. However, for young adults ages between 19 and 29 the decision to migrate is their own. Many times, this decision is not shared or consensual. Because of this, the experience of migration for children and adolescents becomes traumatic. It implicitly involves a progressive loss of social and psychological aspects that often trigger a psychological trauma. In the journeys that took children through the shelters in cities along the Pacific Route, we observed traumatic experiences that will have a significant impact on the construction of their identity. This was especially evident in an interview with a young migrant boy when he said, “Well I cried, but I also feel sad because I feel bad that I left my mom alone...I don’t know what will happened with my life” (Migrant child in Mexico, April 10, 2019, personal interview). Unfortunately, there are not many systems in place to help these children to assimilate the grief and trauma that will be part of their lives.

### Profile of Migrant Children

According to both studies, the profile of the children who are migrating can be easily identified when they are still in their home community.

The characteristics of the profile are classified by age, gender, school level, family situation and the main motive to migrate or leave. Based on the research, the following was discovered about children who are more likely to migrate:

- boys have a higher tendency to leave
- children who are 0 to 6 years old migrate more than those who are 7 to 12
- children who were still going to or only reached basic or lower school
- children who live in a single parent household
- the main reason to migrate was from decisions made by adults without their conscious consent.



WV El Salvador Staff doing activities with children in El Buen Pastor Shelter, Tapachula



## The role of faith-based organizations and churches

Violence remains one of the top three reasons why people migrate in El Salvador, and the lack of efficiency to counter its effects has not helped to decrease it. In many places across El Salvador, gangs are not just a standing danger to public safety but also a de facto authority that exerts tremendous control over residents' daily lives. This allows for violence to be further perpetuated through negative peer influence, especially for adolescents, and through cultures of machismo and harsh discipline that see significant levels of violence in the home. In most cases, low levels of trust in the government and social institutions have left the Church the most trusted institution in El Salvador. Thus, strengthening partnerships with churches and contributing to churches' capacity building to have a stronger voice for child protection was prioritized as a strategic direction for World Vision El Salvador.

In partnership with World Vision, faith-based organizations and churches have adopted actions to respond to this new calling. These organizations have been observed to play an active role in supporting migrants' journeys and providing some of their needs. Also, these institutions often are a replacement in the absence of a state that protects its citizens. An interesting finding from the 2018 research was that 9 of the 10 shelters visited are of Christian denomination (World Vision, 2019 p. 47) This is important to understanding the reason why the shelters were created and have so many volunteers: the churches have seen the need to attend the human and spiritual needs of migrants. For them it's very relevant. Many of the children interviewed in the shelters have mentioned a high participation in churches, so having shelters that are faith-based have a higher perception of trust and safety.

The partnership with churches centered around World Vision's Child Protection and Advocacy (CP&A) project model,<sup>1</sup> a community-based framework for child protection which comes with a "toolkit" of tested methodologies and approaches. In El Salvador, context analysis was conducted to inform the CP&A program design. Based on the results, the following faith-based methodologies were prioritized for action:

- Channels of Hope and Celebrating Families: These two models are among World Vision's global evidence-based models for working with faith leaders to promote community reflection, resolution and social change<sup>2</sup>.
- Raising Children with Tenderness, (Crianza con Ternura): This model was developed by World Vision in Latin America and Caribbean region. Over several months, parents, caregivers, teachers and pastoral leaders meet to talk about violence in their own lives, how it has affected their freedom and opportunity, and how they might protect their own children from facing the same negative experiences. The underlying emphasis is on replacing violent control with love and nurture of individual gifts and talents, based on Christian tenets of love, especially for children<sup>3</sup>.
- Child Friendly Discipleship (Discipulado Amigable para la niñez): This model was also developed by World Vision in Latin America and Caribbean region. It supports building children's life skills and resilience, and it also adds an important component of child and youth participation in strengthening child protection<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wvi.org/development/publication/child-protection-advocacy>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wvi.org/faith-and-development/channels-hope>

<sup>3</sup> <https://worldvision.org.ni/2019/08/01/crianza-con-ternura/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.worldvisionphilanthropy.org/christian-discipleship>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### For the Salvadoran State

**Equitably implement child protection policy.** The results of the investigation indicate that the lack of an enforced child protection policy in the municipalities where migrant and internally displaced children originate serves as a trigger for their migration. Policy implementation has been concentrated in some areas, especially in the capital city and urban areas of the country, yet in rural areas a large number of children continue to be excluded. In this regard, World Vision proposes that government institutions and communities, with the support of civil society organizations, expand the coverage and strengthen the capacities of national protection system agencies responsible for the identification, registration and monitoring of at-risk children residing in vulnerable areas.

**Establish a response protocol to assist migrant and internally displaced children,** so that it is articulated and executed between Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. This would generate a regional tool capable of responding homogeneously to the migration crisis. Having a standardized protocol would guarantee the fulfillment of rights to the migrant and internally displaced population by governments and would allow the population of interest to know the mechanisms they have at the regional level to enforce their human rights in their particular condition of mobility.

### Local governments

**Strengthen institutional capacities at the local level.** It is critical to increase the scope and capacity of public institutions that focus on the communities that care for and respond to the protection needs of displaced and deported children and families. It is important to activate protection mechanisms at the local level, with the support of civil society partners and community leadership. An example would be to ensure that the national protection system is present and functional in the provision of attention for cases involving the violations of rights. In addition, we recommended strengthening efforts to prevent violence in the communities through activities such as: art, sports and cultural activities.

**Strengthen income generation capacities at the local level:** It is important to improve local governments' capacity to develop income generation programs for children and young adults (16 to 29 years old) and families focusing on communities affected by the displacement and migration. It is recommended that, based on market analysis, local governments develop programs that provide vocational training, preparation for employment and/or entrepreneurship with the support of civil society organizations and relevant community actors including private sector.

**Create psychosocial care programs for children:** The municipalities can also play a central role supporting mental health programs by strengthening their capacity to provide attention in the communities where there is a higher concentration of displaced children. This is a very sensitive issue since children often have to face the traumatic effects of the violation of their rights during migration which often includes violence, extortion, threats, or rape. Therefore, these programs can help avoid forced displacement and international migration and decrease the strong impact of the psychological and social trauma on children.

### Non-governmental Organizations

**Create a regional migrant child protection platform.** An inter-institutional platform and strategy at the regional level, with the participation of NGOs present in the Northern Triangle of Central America, should be created to prevent and reduce the human-rights violations of migrant children. In addition, this proposal would look to design and implement different initiatives to combat violence in the complex reality of Central America. This platform could also create and manage monitoring instruments such as a

research center focused on the identification and reporting of the violation of migrant children's rights, as well as generating research materials on this issue for advocacy purposes.

**Engage with churches and faith-based organizations (FBOs).** Churches and FBOs are important social actors for the creation of safe spaces and community activities and promoting peace and violence prevention. Therefore, it is key for NGOs to seek a deep engagement with these actors to enhance their work at the local, national and regional level. Resilience is also a key element provided by these organizations, as it becomes a valuable component to generate social roots of children in their community. Given the broad social reach and territorial coverage of churches and FBOs, NGOs could connect and leverage their programs with these platforms to increase the number of children and families that can benefited.

## CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of children migrating in El Salvador is complex on many levels. Working towards solutions for issues such as providing economic opportunities, ensuring the safety of families in their communities, and caring for the psychological trauma of children will take national governments, local municipalities, NGOs, and faith-based organizations all coming together. Systems, programs and partnerships can be strengthened to protect the most vulnerable children – those living in El Salvador, those who are internally displaced, and those in the process of migrating to other countries.

## REFERENCES

Chishti and Hipsman. (2016). Migration Policy Institute. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/increased-central-american-migration-united-states-may-prove-enduring-phenomenon>.

CNN Español. (2017). Tasa de homicidios en El Salvador cae 13% en el 2016. Retrieved from <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2017/02/18/tasa-de-homicidios-en-el-salvador-cae-13-en-el-2016/>.

Davy, Megan. 2006. "The Central American Foreign Born in the United States." Migration Information Source, April 1. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-foreign-born-united-states/>.

FUSADES. (2018). Informe de Coyuntura Económica. Retrieved from <http://fusades.org/lo-ultimo/noticias/informe-de-coyuntura-econ%C3%B3mica-noviembre-de-2018>.

FUSADES. (2019). Informe de Coyuntura Económica. Retrieved from <http://fusades.org/lo-ultimo/noticias/informe-de-coyuntura-econ%C3%B3mica-noviembre-de-2019>.

Gammage, Sarah. 2007. "El Salvador: Despite End to Civil War, Emigration Continues." Migration Information Source, July 26. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/el-salvador-despite-end-civil-war-emigration-continues/>.

Mahler, Sarah J., and Dusan Ugrina. 2006. "Central America: Crossroads of the Americas." Migration Information Source, April 1. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-america-crossroads-americas/>.

Martínez, Óscar, Efrén Lemus, Carlos Martínez, and Deborah Sontag. "Killers on a Shoestring: Inside the Gangs of El Salvador." The New York Times. N.p., 20 Nov. 2016. Web.

Menjívar, Cecilia. 2000. *Fragmented Ties: Salvadoran Immigrant Networks in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Noe-Bustamante, Luis; Flores, Antonio & Shah, Sono. (2019). Facts on Hispanics of Salvadoran origin in the United States, 2017. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/fact-sheet/u-s-hispanics-facts-on-salvadoran-origin-latinos/>.

Office of the Press Secretary. (2014). FACT SHEET: Emergency Supplemental Request to Address the Increase in Child and Adult Migration from Central America in the Rio Grande Valley Areas of the Southwest Border. The White House- President Barack Obama. Retrieved from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/07/08/fact-sheet-emergency-supplemental-request-address-increase-child-and-adu>.

Passel, Jeffrey S., and D’Vera Cohn. 2014. “Unauthorized Immigrant Totals Rise in 7 States, Fall in 14: Decline in Those from Mexico Fuels Most State Decreases.” November 18. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, Hispanic Trends Project. Retrieved from [http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2014/11/2014-11-18\\_unauthorized-immigration.pdf](http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2014/11/2014-11-18_unauthorized-immigration.pdf).

Pederzini, Carla, Fernando Riosmena, Claudia Masferrer, and Noemy Molina. 2015. “Three Decades of Migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America: A Historical and Demographic Outlook.” CANAMID Policy Brief Series, PB01. Guadalajara, Mexico: CIESAS.

Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD).(2005). Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano El Salvador2005. Retrieved from [https://www.sv.undp.org/content/el\\_salvador/es/home/library/hiv\\_aids/informe-sobre-desarrollo-humano-el-salvador-2005.html](https://www.sv.undp.org/content/el_salvador/es/home/library/hiv_aids/informe-sobre-desarrollo-humano-el-salvador-2005.html).

Robert Muggah, « The Rise of Citizen Security in Latin America and the Caribbean », International Development Policy | Revue internationale de politique de développement [Online], 9 | 2017, Online since 11 October 2017, connection on 18 February 2020. Retrieved from <http://journals.openedition.org/poldev/2377> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/poldev.2377>.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection. (2015). Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children Statistics FY 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2015>.

UNICEF. (2018). Caravana migrante: Niños siguen requiriendo ayuda humanitaria, señala UNICEF. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/lac/comunicados-prensa/caravana-migrante-ninos-siguen-requiriendo-ayuda-humanitaria-senala-unicef>.

Ureste. (2014). Ruta del Pacífico: el camino “más seguro” de los migrantes se torna agresivo. Animal Político. Retrieved from <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2014/03/ruta-del-pacifico-el-camino-mas-seguro-de-los-migrantes-se-torna-agresivo/>.

World Bank. (2017). The World Bank In El Salvador. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/elsalvador/overview>.

World Vision. (2014). Motivos de la migración de la niñez y juventud en 27 municipios de El Salvador. Exploratory study. San Salvador: World Vision.

World Vision. (2019). Niñez migrante, un viaje sin derecho. Exploratory study. San Salvador: World Vision