

Children in Crisis

Insights and Outcomes
From an Evidence Review
of ChildFund's 2017–2024
Americas Programs

June 2025



Executive Summary

This evidence review assesses the strategies and impacts of ChildFund International's Children in Crisis programming in the Americas from 2017 to 2024. ChildFund defines 'children in crisis' as all groups of children directly and indirectly impacted by displacement due to environmental and man-made crises. This review focuses on three programs—**Preventing Irregular Migration of Children and Youth, Support During Displacement of Children and Youth, and Reintegration of Populations After Displacement or Return**—which operated in Mexico, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Honduras, representing different stages of migration: pre-migration, transit, arrival and return.

ChildFund selected these programs because they address the protection needs of children and youth at crucial stages of the migration cycle—pre-migration, transit, and return—ensuring that support is provided at every critical point. This approach allows ChildFund to respond effectively to the evolving challenges faced by children, offering tailored protection based on their specific circumstances.

By documenting these practices and identifying global evidence, this review lays the foundation for scaling successful strategies. ChildFund aims to expand its Children in Crisis programming to 10 countries by 2030, ensuring comprehensive protection and support for vulnerable children, helping them reach their full potential.

This review used standard methods for systematic review, extracting data from program documents including interim and final reports, evaluations, monitoring tools and other program presentations and documents. As secondary research (i.e., an assessment of existing data and results from completed evaluation studies), the quality of the review is dependent on the quality and comprehensiveness of available reports.

Program Overview

The three programs described here were designed to address the protection needs of vulnerable children, families, and communities impacted by displacement. These programs were deployed across various countries, reaching specific target groups in different stages of the migration cycle.

Target Groups

- **Children at risk of irregular migration** and their families, with a unique focus on migration prevention
- **Children and families in transit**, primarily supported in shelters
- **Women, girls and other populations** vulnerable to or survivors of violence
- **Families living in poverty** affected by displacement

Thematic Areas of Inquiry

- 1. Defining the Programs' Design Components:** How are the programs similar and different in terms of program design and implementation?
- 2. Understanding Program Evidence:** Where do we see positive change in outcomes within and across programs?
- 3. Assessing Best Practices for Program Delivery:** What best practices and lessons learned do the studies provide about barriers and facilitators to effective programming for children in crisis?

Key Findings

Program Design

While programs had different focus populations and outcomes, there was some overlap in the types of support provided.

All three programs implemented diverse preventive and responsive protection strategies to address the unique needs of children and youth affected by displacement. These initiatives utilize a community-based approach to deliver educational information, provide direct protection support, and support local partners to build their capacity. By strengthening local systems and enhancing community capabilities, the programs aimed to foster long-term resilience and ensure sustained protection for vulnerable children and youth at the local level beyond the project lifetime.

Key intervention highlights include:

- **Strategy for building youth leadership**, a key focus in both the Preventing Irregular Migration and the Reintegration of Populations After Displacement or Return programs.
- **Livelihood skills development and trafficking prevention strategies**, which were implemented to empower and protect vulnerable populations (Preventing Irregular Migration; Reintegration of Populations After Displacement or Return).
- **Mental health and psychosocial support**, provided to children, youth, and their communities, addressing needs across the socioecological model (Support During Displacement of Children and Youth; Reintegration of Populations After Displacement or Return).
- **Legal support**, which was uniquely offered to displaced populations, providing them with access to justice and protection (Support During Displacement of Children and Youth).
- **Creative engagement strategies**, using music, drama, and art, which made programming more engaging and impactful for children (Reintegration of Populations After Displacement or Return).

Program Evidence

Reach

- The programs operated in **4 countries:** Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and Ecuador.
- Services were delivered in **38 communities** across these regions.
- In Mexico alone, services were provided in **11 shelters** and service centers, reaching over **60 locations** with a high presence of children and families.

This comprehensive approach ensured that ChildFund's interventions directly impacted 133,026 individuals, of which approximately 61,126 were children and young people (age 6-24) from the most vulnerable populations in high-risk areas, addressing their diverse needs and providing critical support.

Outcomes

- **Knowledge and attitudes toward migration:** 66% of youth participants in the Preventing Irregular Migration program reported higher knowledge of the risks of irregular migration, and 25% fewer (from 60% to 35%) youth report intention to migrate after participating in the program.
- **Youth agency:** Participants in the Preventing Irregular Migration program saw a 24% increase (from 21% to 45%) in civic engagement after participating in the program.
- **Livelihood strengthening:** 40% of youth in the Preventing Irregular Migration program reported being employed by the program's end. The Reintegration of Populations After Displacement or Return program reached over 3,500 displacement-affected persons with livelihood support, helping them secure work.
- **Access to services:** The Support During Displacement of Children and Youth program noted a 32% increase (from 40% to 72%) of women, girls and other vulnerable survivors of violence receiving referrals and information about protection-related services.
- **Safety and security:** There was a 16% increase (from 79% to 95%) of people who felt very safe in their community (Preventing Irregular Migration), and a 37% increase (from 46% to 83%) of people who felt safe in shelters (Support During Displacement).
- **Mental health:** Fewer than half as many children reported mental and psychosocial distress after participating in the Support During Displacement of Children and Youth program (35% decrease, from 59% to 24%). 96% of teachers reported gains in skills and knowledge related to their mental health (Reintegration of Populations After Displacement or Return).



ChildFund staff member conducts consultations with girls in Villahermosa shelter.

Best Practices

Across the programs, there were challenges and barriers to implementation, as well as successes and best practices identified. These are important for future program expansion and scaling.

The evidence review also provided important insights on evaluation methods. A complex issue like migration—whether preventing or responding to it—requires a mix of evaluation methods. The three Children in Crisis programs used both quantitative and participatory methods to study program delivery and outcomes.

Cross-cutting barriers

Barriers to successful implementation included the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated changes in program delivery and exacerbated the poor economic conditions that partly drive migration. Other challenges included social and political upheaval in Honduras and Ecuador, natural disasters in Guatemala and Honduras, and violence in communities that affected participants and staff. Language barriers were also something to overcome for programs, although audiovisual techniques were used to facilitate communication across language and culture.

Key success factors

A key success factor for all three programs was their unique localization strategy, effectively implemented in highly complex humanitarian contexts. This approach involved working closely with relevant authorities and stakeholders at multiple levels, from the community level to local and international actors. Direct community engagement further increased accessibility and acceptability, ensuring the programs effectively met the needs of children and youth.

Tailored approaches, like mobile outreach and roving teams, engaged hard-to-reach populations, especially displaced people outside the shelter system. Additional strategies included removing financial barriers through no-cost programming, coordinating efforts with public entities and NGOs to influence local practices, and advocacy efforts that led to systemic changes, such as promoting children's rights and establishing educational boards.

Conclusion

Overall, the programs, while operating in difficult circumstances, were able to reach remote populations with interventions that met at least some of the needs and contributed to important protection, livelihood, and mental health outcomes. Close coordination with communities and partners from the beginning is key to successful implementation and can potentially facilitate sustainability.